



MOTORISTS FACE MAJOR DELAYS

Report by Richard Guttridge

DRIVERS are facing new year roadworks chaos, with a major scheme to close a main road in one direction sending traffic on long detours.

Carriageway reconstruction work will be taking place on the B4179 Commons in Pensnett from the first week of January, forcing traffic heading south to be diverted past Russells Hall Hospital.

A temporary one-way route will come into force, with only traffic heading north able to access the road which is often clogged with traffic heading towards Merry Hill shopping centre.

The one-way system will be running between 9.30am and 3.30pm and is scheduled to be in place for three weeks.

Traffic coming from the direction of Kingswinford face a three-mile detour taking motorists to the other side of the Fens Pools Nature Reserve.

Drivers will have to travel along High Street, past the hospital, onto Pensnett Road and Stourbridge Road, down through Woodside towards Briery Hill before getting back onto John Street.

It will also mean more traffic is pushed onto the busy Stourbridge Road.

The area where work will take place will stretch from Corbys Hall Road down to Bryce Road.

Motorists have been advised to give themselves more time for their journeys or consider finding another route.

Dudley Council said the work had been planned outside peak times in order to create as little disruption as possible.

Significant

Bosses said clear diversion signs would be in place to guide motorists.

But the work is still set to cause misery for thousands of drivers who use the route every day.

Pensnett councillor Karen Jordan said the work would cause significant disruption in the area.

She said: "I understand letters will go out to residents along Commons and that the council will try to get it done during the day time to minimise disruption."

"It is going to affect people but it is work that has got to be done."

"I just hope disruption is kept to a minimum. It is a major road but this is just something that has to be done."

It is the latest in a series of roadworks schemes for the area. Temporary traffic lights are to go up on Doulton Road, Rowley Regis, on January 3 as part of a scheme which is expected to last for up to a year. Work is also taking place this weekend on Birmingham New Road.

● Roadworks - pages 2 and 3

STORES HELP BRING FESTIVE JOY TO CHILDREN



Sainsbury's Amblecote store manager Kirsty Rose with more than 100 gifts for less fortunate Dudley children this Christmas

UNDER-PRIVILEGED children in Dudley will have a chance to unwrap surprise presents this Christmas as generous customers and staff have donated toys.

Thanks to an initiative run by Dudley Council and Sainsbury at Amblecote and Merry Hill shopping centre, the annual toy appeal will see more than 100 toys and gifts go towards a family Christmas party.

The party is held by the council-run Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST), which currently works with 190 families and 353 children.

The team is based at Greystone Passage in Dudley and offers a range of services to families who are experiencing difficulties.

FAST has this Christmas combined forces with the supermarket giant in Dudley borough to bring smiles to the faces of less fortunate children.

Councillor Ian Cooper, cabinet member for children's services, said: "It's great to see the council and Sainsbury working together to make this special initiative a reality once again this Christmas."

"But what's even better, is the generosity

of people in our communities who have kindly donated toys to this worthy cause."

"This initiative is a wonderful example of local people coming together to support others in our community."

"Thank you to all of those that have donated toys and to Sainsbury for working with us to promote this initiative and support children and families in need this Christmas."

Kirsty Rose, Amblecote store manager, said: "I would like to thank all our customers and colleagues who have donated toys and gifts to this year's Toy Appeal."

APPEAL

Generous readers donate 8,500 items

AN INCREDIBLE 8,500 food items and toiletries have been donated to the Express & Star's Feed a Family This Christmas appeal.

The Chronicle's sister newspaper has been overwhelmed by the kindness of people across the Black Country and Staffordshire who have dug deep to help those less fortunate.

Donations of festive treats and other produce have flooded in since the appeal was launched five weeks ago. Every item will go towards helping families to put a substantial meal on the table this Christmas.

HEALTH

Patients will get extra £4m boost

A £4.3 million cash boost has been awarded to Dudley's clinical commissioning group to further improve health and social care in the borough.

The money will be awarded to the All Together Better partnership which is a national programme made up of health and social care organisations.

The 'vanguard' programme aims to deliver improved outcomes by improving the access to, and continuity of, care through the integration of services around the patient and GP practice

COUNCIL

Tory boss opposes leisure centre move

DUDLEY Council's plan to close three leisure centres and build two new facilities could be in doubt after opposition councillors suggested they may not back it.

The controversial proposals have been met with a public backlash with more than 2,500 people signing a petition calling to save the centres in Dudley, Stourbridge and Halesowen.

The council's bid to have just two new leisure centres serving the borough, on Flood Street and in Lye, would need support of some opposition councillors but Tory group leader Councillor Patrick Harley insists the borough has three centres.



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Hospital trust appoints chief executive



New boss Diane Wake

THE trust which runs Dudley's Russell's Hall Hospital has announced the appointment of a new chief executive. Diane Wake will take on the top job, joining the Dudley Group NHS Trust from a similar role in Barnsley. She will replace Paula Clark, who announced she was quitting as chief executive in August to take over at crisis-hit Stafford County Hospital. Ms Wake will start work in the post in April. She has been chief executive at the Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust for three years and previously held a senior role in Liverpool.

Ms Wake said: "I am thrilled at the appointment and look forward to making a difference for the patients of Dudley and surrounding areas. "I am passionate about making local services right for people and in Dudley there are lots of opportunities to do just that. "Working with GPs and other local providers to develop the Multi-speciality Community Provider services will result in ground-breaking changes to the way services are accessed and coordinated for patients and their families. "At the same time, together with my

executive team, we will ensure that hospital services continue to perform amongst the best in the country and are sustainable longer term." "I am looking forward to meeting as many staff as possible and working with the council of Governors to make sure patients and the public's voices are heard at the board and used to make a difference to services." Standards at Russell's Hall improved dramatically under the guidance of Ms Clark as it became one of the best performing hospitals in the country in some areas of service.

Young children left alone in filthy home

A MOTHER left her three youngest children in a home strewn with rubbish, urine and faeces, while she took her eldest with her to attack a relative's door with an axe.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard how the mother from Coseley, who cannot be named for legal reasons, had left her youngest children at the unlocked property with no food in the fridge and only one working light. Instead she had armed herself with an axe at around half past midnight on August 1 and took her eldest child with her while she used the weapon to smash glass and take chunks out of the front door of a relative's home. The defendant pleaded guilty to four counts of cruelty to a child, having a sharply pointed article in a public place, and damaging property, but walked free from court after receiving a 10 month prison sentence suspended for 18 months.

Drunk

Prosecutor James Bruce said police could tell that the woman was drunk. After obtaining her address, an officer went around to their home. Mr Bruce said: "The bed clothes were soaked in urine and faeces, and the whole room smelt of urine." The officer found that only one room had a working light, and there was no food in the fridge. "There was rubbish and used nappies in every room," he added. Defending, Mr Timothy Harrington said: "She had been in an abusive relationship for four years. She was prescribed medication but she sought solace in drink." Mr Harrington said his client had since turned her life around. Passing sentence, Judge Amjad Nawaz, said: "The sad fact is what you did was expose those children to danger that they should not have been exposed to." In addition to a suspended prison sentence of 10 months for each of the child cruelty charges, to be served concurrently, Judge Nawaz also ordered that she serve eight months concurrently for the axe offence, as well as taking part in 30 days of a rehabilitation activity requirement.

Demands over danger junction



Councillor Michael Evans is calling for measures at an accident blackspot in Sedgley

A COUNCILLOR is calling for action to improve road safety at a notorious accident blackspot in Dudley. Councillor Michael Evans described the junction of Gospel End Street and Vicar Street as 'the most dangerous junction in Sedgley'. Councillor Evans said: "The junction itself is a renowned danger spot in Sedgley and has been for a very long time. "There are a lot of cars that come from the Bullring island next to

The Clifton and drivers don't realise that they're not on the main road. We've been talking to highways for quite some time about possible improvements and various suggestions have been made. "They've suggested putting an island there to replace the junction but I think they'll go with the other idea they suggested, which is to create more of a diversion further to the left about 10 or 15 yards further up."

A crash involving a car and van on that stretch of road recently causing severe morning rush hour delays in the Sedgley area. Dudley North MP Ian Austin called for police to tackle speeding on the road after residents voiced their fears. Councillor Evans added: "All being well, the proposed plans for the junction could go ahead in the middle of 2017. It's looking likely that a diversion will be placed there to hopefully prevent any more accidents."

Drug addict charity box thief is put behind bars

A DRUG addict who stole charity collection boxes, broke into the same pub twice and used someone else's bank card to buy booze has been jailed. Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that Wayne Ball targeted The Cave pub in Dudley while it was being renovated. The 32-year-old went on to snatch collection boxes from a Your Local Express, containing £250, before being tracked down after being pictured on CCTV. Ball, from Swancotes Road, Dudley, pleaded guilty to two counts of burglary, three counts of fraud, one count of handling stolen goods, one count of theft and one of cannabis possession. He was given three-and-a-half years in prison. The burglary charges relate to two separate incidents where he broke into The Cave pub in Wren's Hill Road, in which he stole a plate compactor tool, 60 inch TV and caused damage. He had been given a suspended sentence after the first incident.

Prosecuting, Sati Ruck, said: "The stolen card he used to purchase alcohol - which he then sold for drug money - was taken during a house robbery which he says he had no part in. He claims to have found the card in an alleyway near the house." Defending Ball, Estelle Thornber said he had been suffering with addictions to crack cocaine and heroin. Handling Ball a jail sentence, Judge Nicholas Webb told him: "You were given another chance after breaking into The Cave the first time, but just five days later you're doing the same thing."

Hopes high for light rail funding

COUNCIL bosses are hopeful a multi-million pound 'very light rail' innovation centre in Dudley will get under way after submitting a fresh funding bid. Outline plans for the £27.8 million complex at Castle Hill were approved in October, with chiefs now focusing on securing the money to pay for it. The centre would be created for the design and construction of lightweight rail vehicles plus research and development facilities. Dudley Council has lodged a bid for a total of £837,000 with the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership. Development boss Councillor Khurshid Ahmed said: "Creating jobs is a top priority for the council and the very light rail scheme will deliver on this. We continue to pave the way for this exciting scheme."

Warning of works on a busy route

MAJOR disruption is expected on the Birmingham New Road as work takes place over the weekend. Lane restrictions will be in place at the junction of Shaw Road between 9.30am and 3.30pm on both Saturday and Sunday.

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Roadworks for housing sites will hit traffic

MOTORISTS are facing traffic misery on a main road running through Rowley Regis with roadworks set to last for months.

Temporary traffic lights will go up on Doulton Road in Rowley Regis, during the first week of the new year as work is carried out to connect 200 new homes to gas, water and electricity supplies.

The work, being done by utility companies, will get under way on January 3 and will also cause disruption for residents.

The connections will supply new homes being built by developers Kier Homes, Countryside and Smart Build Solutions on Doulton Road and there another small development of two homes on Dudley Road.

Sandwell Council's roads boss Councillor David Hosell said: "These are essential works to connect these new homes to water, sewers, gas and electricity supplies."

"We really need new homes built in Sandwell but with that comes the job of connecting these sites up to utilities."

"This will cause some inconvenience in the area and I'd ask people to be patient. It's something that is unavoidable."

"I am sure the utility companies and their contractors will make sure this work as swiftly as they can, but it's a big job."

The biggest development is to build 188 homes on a former haulage firm site off Doulton Road, a mix of properties over 12.8 acres of land.

Horse rescue at museum canal

A HORSE belonging to the Black Country Living Museum fell into a canal during a boat pulling practice session and had to be rescued.

The fire service had to be called to lift the horse, called Danny, out of the water, following the incident on Thursday afternoon. The 14-year-old horse had slipped into the canal.

Laura Wakelin, director of communications at the Tipton Road museum, said: "They were practising when one of our horses unfortunately slipped and fell into the canal. He was with two of our horse handlers, and one of them, Chris Turton, actually jumped in to help."

They called the fire service for assistance and Danny was soon back on dry land without injury.

More police speed checks on road

SPEED checks have been stepped up along a Dudley road after two fatal accidents in recent months.

Police say they are responding to community concern about Priory Road.

Protesters question 'ridiculous' plan



Protesters outside the council meeting

PROTESTERS say plans to knock down three leisure centres in Dudley borough are ridiculous.

Dudley Council wants to build two new centres to replace those closed.

An axe hovers over Dudley Leisure Centre, on Wellington Road, Halesowen Leisure Centre, on Great Cornbow Road, and The Crystal Leisure Centre, Stourbridge.

The new sites suggested are at Flood Street in Dudley and land off the Lye bypass, meaning Halesowen being without a leisure centre.

The Save Our Leisure Centres

group has gained more than 2,500 names on its anti-closure petitions.

The cash-strapped council says it would cost over £19 million to bring the three existing centres up to date.

The Save Our Leisure Centres campaign is being led by former councillor Tracy Wood, who was at the protest by leisure centre users outside a council cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

"It doesn't make any sense," she said.

"I can't see how it is cheaper and more efficient to close three and build two new centres. They could refurbish them - we are not asking for gold-plated treadmills."

The meeting saw the approval of the next stage, a planning model to be created so the council can put forward a business case for the proposals.

Among those demonstrating was Sarah Woodward, fundraiser and coach for charity Dudley Olympics, whose activities include providing weekly swimming sessions for more than 50 disabled people at Halesowen Leisure Centre. She said their clients were 'really upset' by the council move.

Parking concern over homes near hospital

AROUND 130 homes could be built near Russells Hall Hospital, sparking fears it could lead to more parking problems.

Council bosses are poised to approve the plans for the 11-acre development off Red Kite Drive and Middlepark Road.

Objections have been raised including a petition launched by tenants living at sheltered accommodation at Rotary House.

Mike Summerfield, from the Dudley Rotary club, said more than 30 residents had signed the petition.

He explained: "My concerns are about the problems that will affect the tenants of Rotary House."

"Middlepark Road is a main road and is used as a rabbit run for traffic coming through the Russells Hall estate."

"We are disappointed that the council have not been able to give us land to expand our car parks and we are worried that the tenants will not have sufficient car parking anymore due to this development."

Parking has been a long-term problem with streets near the hospital clogged by motorists keen to avoid parking fees. Hundreds of parking tickets have been issued in the side streets.

Badger

The land is also listed as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation, and concern has been raised about the impact on badger colonies.

The development application comes from Keepmoat Homes for a mix of houses, bungalows and apartments.

Councillor Khurshid Ahmed, planning and regeneration boss, wants the development to go ahead. He said: "It is mixed feelings as far as the community are concerned. But this is a regeneration opportunity for more houses, of which there is a great shortage at the moment."

"I welcome this development. But there are issues about that conservation area that will be addressed. We will be making sure that the right action is taken with the badgers too."

"However, this site has been allocated for housing since the 1990s and I feel that houses and jobs for the build should be welcomed in the area."

Black Country tycoon Roy Richardson is considering building a new low-cost car park opposite the hospital.

School replace stolen charity goods



Crestwood pupils with some of the items being donated to the Mary Stevens Hospice shop in Wordsley

STUDENTS, parents and staff and members at a Kingswinford school have come to the rescue of a hospice charity shop after stock was stolen.

The garage used for storage by the Mary Stevens Hospice Shop, in Wordsley, was raided last month.

Business and marketing director at The Crestwood School, Martin Jordan, heard about the incident and set up a donation

bank, after asking students, staff and the community to donate items that the charity could benefit from.

Each form ambassador delivered increased donations to the school office.

Mr Jordan said: "I put out an appeal to all the classes asking for donations. The school as a whole felt incredibly angry that someone would steal from any shop, let alone a charity shop who do good

work for people. We felt disgusted that something like it happened practically on our doorstep as the shop is only down the road."

"We ended up with two cars full of donations which was incredible. We also donated 15 boxes worth of books from our own library at the school."

Dawn Spencer, shop manager, said: "The community spirit shown to us has been phenomenal."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Anger as funding of force hit hard

WEST Midlands Police has had its Home Office funding cut by £6 million for next year.

Britain's second biggest force will receive £444.1m - down from £450.1m.

Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson said: "The West Midlands has seen its force hit harder than anywhere else in the country. The cuts from central government are more than twice as big this year as were last year. This funding settlement fails to recognise that crime is changing and not falling."

Axe swinging thug tried to steal a car

A MOTORIST was targeted by a thug with an axe who he tried to steal his car.

Police are investigating after the terrifying incident in Halesowen on Monday, December 12.

A 22-year-old man was driving home from a shopping trip to the Merry Hill centre when a car pulled up alongside him on Most Drive and a man jumped out, smashing the passenger window with an axe.

But the frightened motorist managed to drive away and is not thought to have been hurt.

Motorcyclists help Santa deliver gifts

BIKERS took to the streets of Halesowen and Birmingham to donate toys and essential items to ill youngsters and their families.

A total of 300 bikers from across the West Midlands came together on Sunday to present children at Birmingham Children's Hospital with Christmas presents. Riders dressed up as elves, reindeer, snowmen and even Santa to travel from Streetbiker, on Dudley Road, Halesowen, to Ronald McDonald House in Birmingham.

Hospice donation on the cards from firm

GENEROUS staff at a recruiting agency have donated £1,000 to a hospice instead of sending Christmas cards.

Workers at Masstemp Ltd, based in Dudley and Kidderminster, gave the money to the Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge. Lindsay Jay, compliance director at Masstemp, said: "We are very proud to support such a great local charity."

The hospice has launched its biggest fundraising drive for a new unit.

Council to test cabbies

COUNCIL staff will take over the running of tests for taxi drivers in Dudley.

Assessments to ensure drivers were competent before being allowed to go out on the road were previously delivered by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, DVSA.

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



MORE weather-forecast English. This week's warning was of "murky-mizzly."

A READER says she is disappointed to learn from this column that pansexuality has nothing to do with pans. She was working on her debut novel, Fifty Shades of Stew.

WHOPPERS of our time. I heard one pundit describe the brought-forward hike in council tax to pay for social care as "a temporary rise." Yeah, right.

BUT the council tax had to be the target, didn't it? Freezing it for several years had become a totem of Toryism, a buffer protecting the property-rich from the demands of Britain's uncontrollable welfare bill. The real hit will come when Westminster re-bands the nation's homes based on today's inflated values and the most desirable addresses will be in Much Weeping in the Shires.

THE curse of predictive texting. A friend and I provided ukulele-and-songs entertainment for a Christmas party under our performing names of Two Old Pluckers. We appeared in the programme as Two Old Plonkers. Our complaint was not upheld.

SO farewell, Ian McCaskill. I never interviewed the BBC weather forecaster, who recently died, but he suddenly appeared in the office in Broadcasting House many years ago where I was interviewing the chief forecaster, Bill Giles. McCaskill burst in like a busy little shrew, sorting through some papers while robustly denouncing some ****ing **** he had just fallen out with. It was all light-hearted but to hear the housewives' favourite effing and blinding like a navy was a bit of a shock. As I wrote at the time, it was like seeing the Pope spit.



"EU leaders richly deserved Brexit and British voters were right to give them it." Historian and columnist Niall Ferguson, admitting he was wrong to argue against Brexit and is now relieved to be "back on the right side." There is plenty of time for all you other sinners to repent.

OH, Yuletide fooltide. I have invested in a pair of cargo trousers which are not only cheaper than jeans but harder-wearing and look much better on rumps of a certain age. They come with many pockets in which you can lose things. Some pairs have a special pouch for knee pads, which must be very useful when you're begging the kids not to put you in a home.

FIRST cracker of the season: "What happened to the hyena who swallowed an Oxo cube? He became a laughing stock."

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

New ambulances roll out across region

HI-TECH ambulances labelled 'the most sophisticated emergency vehicles in the world' are being rolled out in the Black Country as part of a £21 million upgrade.

West Midlands Ambulance Service is launching 66 new ambulances. The fleet of Fiat Ducatos, some of which are already in use, are fitted with CCTV and will be cheaper to run, say bosses.

The vehicles are made using lightweight materials. The back doors have been fitted with hydraulic rams to make them easier to open and close. Improved air suspension will provide a better ride and handling.

A new touch screen operates the lighting, CCTV and climate control.

Tony Page, WMAS Fleet General Manager, added: "By using construction methods used in aircraft manu-

facture we are providing our patients and staff with a quieter and warmer working area.

"The techniques used mean the vehicles are lighter which will improve the handling and reduce fuel and maintenance costs, allowing us to invest even more into frontline clinical care.

"We have worked closely with our staff and the manufacturers to de-

sign the vehicles so that they are easy to use and easier to clean. All of the vehicles also include CCTV systems that will help to protect our staff."

WMAS Chief Executive, Anthony Marsh, said: "These new ambulances are some of the most sophisticated emergency vehicles in the world. Not only are they packed full of the latest technology to help patients, but they are more comfortable and efficient."

Sandwich boss fined over hygiene failings

By Clare Butler

THE boss of a sandwich making company has been ordered to pay £13,000 over food hygiene failings.

Manpreet Singh Dosanjh, director of Fresh Bite Sandwiches Ltd, received a six-month prison sentence suspended for 24 months at Wolverhampton Crown Court.

He pleaded guilty to 15 charges relating to the cleanliness of his premises and other food hygiene issues. Dosanjh, whose Tivdale business was at one point producing up to 3,000 sandwiches a day, was disqualified from being a director of a company for five years. An order banning him from running a food business remains in place.

The court heard that Dosanjh, of Wellington Road, Bilston, initially ran Fresh Bites as proprietor before he made the business into a limited company, Fresh Bite Sandwiches Ltd, of which he was sole director.

The business in Dudley Road West produces pre-packed sandwiches distributed nationally for sale.

Protect

Seven of the charges were heard in August by magistrates, who referred the case to crown court for sentencing following Dosanjh's guilty pleas. Dosanjh was charged with eight other offences.

Dosanjh, aged 25, admitted all 15 offences in court on December 2. Charges included failing to keep the food business clean and failing to provide hygienic hand-drying facilities and adequate changing facilities for staff, failing to protect food from contamination and having inadequate provision for storage and disposal of waste.

He also admitted failing to provide environmental health officers with information and assistance.

The court fined him £8,000 in total for failing to have permanent procedures relating to food hygiene principles between December 2014 and August 2016. The court also ordered him to pay £5,000 costs plus a £120 victim's surcharge.

Posters give snapshot of display history



With posters from the 1990's, Councillor Khurshid Ahmed with some of the posters at Dudley Museum and

RARE posters promoting events at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery dating back 30 years have been uncovered as staff moved exhibitions to a new home.

The posters, which were included in exhibitions on Elvis Presley, UFOs and dinosaurs, were discovered as part of the move of the collections to the Archives building in Tipton Road as the town centre building closed its doors this week.

Councillor Khurshid Ahmed, cabinet member for planning and economic development, said: "These posters are quite a find and show some of the fantastic exhibitions we provide at our museums. I am also pleased they will be formally handed to the archives staff for safe keeping and for future generations to see.

"The move to the Archives building is an exciting challenge and will allow us to continue celebrating the fascinating history and heritage that this borough has to offer."

The new museum will be open next summer and will have improved parking for visitors and school groups as well as better access for people with disabilities.

Earlier this year Dudley Council revealed the museum and art gallery in St James's Road was to be closed down as a result of financial cuts.

But following a petition by more than 4,000 people hoping to save the attraction, a scheme was unveiled to move the museum's collections across town to the Archives centre.

Ofsted tells short stay school it has to improve

A SHORT-STAY school catering for excluded pupils has been told to improve by inspectors.

Ofsted said the behaviour of pupils was 'inconsistent' and teaching required improvement at Sycamore Short Stay school following the inspection on October 13.

Inspectors criticised the lack of after-school activities available to pupils at the Dudley Council-run school.

Council bosses said they are working closely with the school, which has 34 pupils, to address issues highlighted by the recent Ofsted report.

Councillor Ian Cooper, cabinet member for children's services, said: "The school's newly-appointed head teacher brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record.

"The school's management team shares in our belief that education for children and young people in Dudley is a top priority and together we will work to improve outcomes for pupils."

The school, located on Old Farm Estate in Dudley, 'required improvement' across a range of issues. Inspectors said school leaders did not ensure that teachers applied school policies, such as marking and behaviour management, consistently. But they did strongly promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in lessons.

An inspector said: "The head-teacher has set high standards for how pupils learn and behave in school. Developing mutual respect and tolerance are central to the school's aims."

Former player dies after cancer battle

FORMER Wolves player Ian Cartwright has died aged 52.

The ex-midfielder had been battling with cancer for several years.

Birmingham-born Cartwright moved to Wolves from non-league Brierley Hill in 1980.

He made his debut as a substitute in a 4-1 Second Division defeat to Oldham in November 1982, scoring his first goal against Middlesbrough a month later. He was a regular as Wolves won promotion to the top flight that season but was forced to retire through injury in 1986. He played 68 times for Wolves, scoring twice.

A Wolves spokesperson said: "Ian had been bravely battling cancer for over a decade. Our sincere condolences go to Ian's wife Julie, his family and friends."

Jobless figures fall across Black Country

JOBLESS figures are down across the Black Country and Staffordshire.

Despite rises in many areas, in the West Midlands unemployment fell by 25,000 over three months, to 151,000.

The UK now has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU.

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Recycle rubbish over festive period

DUDLEY residents have been reminded that the borough's Household Waste Recycling Centre is accepting waste and recycling over the Christmas period.

The Birmingham Street site in Stourbridge will be open every day apart from Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

People can take a large number of items to the centre for recycling including Christmas trees, packaging and unwanted electrical goods. Cardboard and wrapping paper can be recycled through the kerbside collection.

Thousands apply for police jobs

MORE than 3,000 people have applied for 1,150 jobs at West Midlands Police in its latest recruitment drive, it has been revealed.

And a third of candidates are from black or ethnic minority backgrounds.

The force is recruiting 800 officers, 150 police community support officers (PCSOs) and 200 specialist staff over the next three years.

Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson and Chief Constable Dave Thompson are keen to see the force's staff and officers reflect the ethnic makeup of the region.

200 flock to join village U3A group

MEMBERSHIP of a social group in Kinver is rising to the 200 mark less than 12 months after opening.

The University of the Third Age group, or U3A has also recently launched its latest activity, tai chi.

Other activities at venues in the village include walking, languages, music, choral, table tennis, a monthly quiz, bird watching, and genealogy. A jazz event is planned for February. Call chairman Nick Geoghegan on 07852 424259.

Politician is pleased by theatre rescue

UKIP Euro MP and Sedgley councillor Bill Etheridge has praised the volunteers who have saved Dudley Hippodrome from demolition. The group who rescued the historic Castle Hill venue, being renamed Black Country Hippodrome, have been given the keys by Dudley Council and have launched a fundraising campaign. Mr Etheridge said: "I am really impressed with the work of all the volunteers to make sure the building stays alive. I can't wait to see it reopened."

Extra Sabbath seats

EXTRA tickets have been released for one of the farewell concerts by Birmingham heavy rock legends Black Sabbath at the NEC.

"The End" tour is finishing at the Genting Arena on February 2 and 4 with extra seats made available for the February 2 show.

Fewer than half of all pupils hit benchmark

DUDLEY saw its primary schools fall to the bottom of the pile in the Black Country, with fewer than half of all pupils reaching the benchmark standard.

Across the borough, 49 per cent of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.

Dudley came joint 122nd in the national league table.

High-performing schools included Blowers Green Primary and Brierley Hill Primary, both of which saw 82 per cent of youngsters reach the required levels in the three key subject areas.

Dudley's education boss, Councillor Ian Cooper said: "The newly published league tables are disappointing. We recognise that this was a transitional year with schools and teachers working hard to prepare children for new, challenging tests based on a revised national curriculum that places higher demands on children.

Whilst results across the borough are not what we would have wished, it is important to note that a significant number of our schools achieved test results that were significantly above the national average, with many pupils making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics."

He praised teachers for their dedication and added that he expects to see 'a stronger set of results' in 2017.

Just over half of pupils in Sandwell's primary schools achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and maths as 51 per cent of 11-year-olds reached the required levels.

Council staff help Operation Santa

STAFF at Dudley Council have supported the annual Operation Santa appeal by donating Christmas gifts for children.

Dudley Council for Voluntary Service (DVCS) has received around 500 items including clothing, school materials, toiletries, books, toys and games. DVCS organises and distributes the collection of items for cash-strapped families in Dudley borough.

Mayor of Dudley Councillor Mohammed Hanif said: "Once again, people from across the council have dug deep and been incredibly generous to help children and families this Christmas. I would like to thank all who have donated and would like to give everyone my best wishes for Christmas and the New Year."

Brum voted worst place to park in UK

A POLL to find the worst place to park in the UK has put Birmingham top of the list. In a list compiled by insurance firm Privilege, Birmingham received a score of 228. Manchester 217 and London 204.

Hospital chiefs want total smoking ban

BLACK Country and Staffordshire health bosses want to ban smoking from their sites to help improve the health of patients and staff.

Nearly 16 per cent of the West Midlands' population smoke and tobacco use is still the single largest cause of health inequalities and premature death in the region.

National health chiefs wrote to each trust pushing them to ban smoking in all hospital buildings and grounds to help people give up and improve health.

Sandwell and West Birmingham Trust confirmed to the Express & Star that when its super hospital opens in November 2018, all sites will be smoke free.

While the Dudley Group Trust said it was seeking to ban all smoking on its grounds.

Currently both, along with the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, allow smoking – but only in designated areas.

It comes as Public Health England (PHE) chief executive Duncan Selbie wrote to every NHS trust's chief executive in the country pushing them to ban smoking on all hospital buildings and grounds.

Sandwell and West Birmingham Trust's chief executive, Toby Lewis, said: "Our sites will be smoke-free by November 2018 shortly after our new Midland Met Hospital opens. Currently, we have clear smoking shelters on our sites and expect patients, visitors and staff to only smoke in these designated areas."

Acting chief executive of the Dudley Group NHS

Foundation Trust, Paul Harrison, said: "The Trust is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of all staff and visitors to our premises by ensuring a smoke free environment in the direct vicinity of our buildings.

"We do our best to enforce our Smoke Free Policy which states the smoking of cigarettes and e-cigarettes is only permitted in designated smoking shelters at our three hospital sites. We offer advice to staff and patients on the risks of smoking and encourage them to stop smoking with the help of nicotine replacements.

"We are in early discussions to create to a totally smoke-free environment and will be consulting with staff and patients on the best way to achieve this."

Stadium gets £550,000 funding for a new pitch

AN ARTIFICIAL grass pitch at a sports stadium in Brierley Hill could be getting a £660,000 revamp next year.

The Dell Stadium on Bryce Road has been granted £550,000 from the Football Foundation through the FA and a potential £110,000 from the council.

The proposed plans include a refurbishment of the existing pitch, an extended pitch area with a new playing surface, hard standing areas for pedestrian access, goals storage, replacement floodlights and outdoor storage for maintenance equipment.

Andy Bell, interim head of sport and leisure at Dudley Council, said: "The pitch has reached the end of its natural life, it was put down in 1998 but various complaints have been made about the quality."

"We're hoping to start work on the construction in March or April which will run for 18 weeks but the new pitch will hopefully open for the start of 2017/18 football season.

"The new pitch will be big enough to play competitive 11-a-side football and smaller areas can be used for training."

The pitch is currently used by Wordsley Wasps, Pensnett Panthers and Dudley Town football clubs. Dudley Ladies Hockey Club used to use the pitch but recently moved to South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy as the Dell's pitch didn't suit their requirements.

Mr Bell added: "We're hoping that the new pitch will encourage more clubs to come and train or play at the Dell. We're simply providing a facility which is in greater demand."

The Dell currently has a floodlit 400m athletics track with field facilities currently used by Dudley and Stourbridge Harriers Athletics Club.

Purpose

Councillor Khurshid Ahmed, cabinet member responsible for leisure centres, said: "Working in conjunction with The FA and local groups, such as Dudley Town FC and Pensnett Panthers FC, we are resurfacing the artificial grass pitch at Dell Stadium. We will replace the surface with newer materials that are more sustainable and fit for purpose, which will allow more groups to utilise the facilities.

"The project is expected to cost £650,000 and will be predominately funded by a grant from The FA Football Foundation. The remaining £110,000 will be funded through the council's capital allocations programme."

The application will go to the planning committee in coming weeks.



Steve Gay and Andy Webb at The Dell Stadium, where leisure bosses hope for a £660,000 renovation

Hundreds visit landmark church building

AROUND 1,500 visitors have walked through the doors of a landmark Dudley church since it re-opened in the summer.

The Grade II-listed St John's church, in Kates Hill, was closed to the public in November 2002 after it was deemed to be unsafe.

But since throwing open its doors in August, following a successful campaign to re-open it for the community and for services,

it has undergone several repairs aimed at fully bringing back into use.

Deb Brownlee, of St John's Preservation Group, said: "The main thing is we opened the building straight up for the public, seven days a week, and about 1,500 people have visited so far – a great credit to this wonderful church building."

"The first few months have

been quite frenetic as we try to achieve many things for the building at the same time. The building is now windproof and watertight."

The group are appealing for financial help to carry out further works and with to assist with running costs – insurance along costs around £200 per week.

A celebration event is being held on Saturday from 6pm.

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IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews



Anyone got a spare library to give away?

THE Black Country Living Museum is looking for an unused former library to add to its open-air village. Something tells me in the current climate they won't have to look too far to find one.

And there will be a nice art gallery and a few swimming pools available soon... □□□

INTERESTINGLY, one of the reasons given by Dudley Council for closing swimming pools is the declining number of people who use them.

Now that I can well believe. Indeed, I used to be a regular user of the pool at Dudley Leisure Centre until 11 years ago or so, when I stopped going altogether. Why? Because they stopped opening to the general public in the evening, to accommodate a swimming club from another centre they had closed.

A POLL in our sister paper the Express & Star found that 75 per cent of readers think shops should be banned from opening on Boxing Day.

As something of a libertarian, I'm not a fan of banning many things. But then I think back to the days when I used to work Boxing Day, and the distraction of the inconsiderate shoppers who not only considered it their inalienable right to park on our office car park near a well-known shopping mall, but also to climb over the fence next to the window just to get to the shops more quickly.

Can you imagine how annoying that used to be? Does anybody really need to go shopping that badly?

Still if 75 per cent of the population want Boxing Day shopping banned, then maybe the shopping malls will be deserted on December 26. Either that, or our readers are far more sensible than the rest of the population.

The Football Association is "out of balance", filled with "elderly white men" and in desperate need of reform. So say four, er, elderly white men, who all used to be senior executives of the FA before stepping down for one reason or another.

Greg Dyke, David Bernstein, David Davies and Lord Triesman want the Government to step in and add impose a bit of diversity into the mix. Yippee, never mind Brexit, let's nationalise football.

I suspect if you did a straw poll of most fans about what is wrong with football, the main bugbears would probably revolve around there being too much money in the game, too much of it going to a cartel of half a dozen clubs dotted around London and the north-west, and the persistent under-achievement of the national team.

I bet not one of them would be calling for a task force headed by John Major or Gordon Brown.



The old Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton



Gas Showroom, decorated for the Coronation in 1937



The site of the former Parish's Restaurant, West Bromwich

Historic buildings to be talk of the town

£10m of Lottery funding could enable landmark buildings to find a new home at a popular attraction. **ROB COX** reports

HISTORIC buildings from across the region could resurrected at the Black Country Living Museum under multi-million pound plans to create a 1940-60s town.

Landmark community buildings, much-loved pubs and industrial sites are among those which have been targeted by bosses at the popular tourist attraction.

While some would be taken down brick-by-brick and then rebuilt at the Dudley site, others which no longer exist would be recreated using archive images and information.

The proposed attraction is reliant upon £10 million of Heritage Lottery funding and a bid has been submitted for the cash.

If successful work could begin in 2018 and 93 jobs would be created – with hundreds more while work is carried out.

Demolition

Among the buildings identified for the 1940-60s town is Woodside Library in Stourbridge Road, Dudley, which has lain empty and boarded up since it was closed in 2008 under council cost-cutting measures.

Also being lined-up for 'translocation' is the West Bromwich Gas Showroom in the town's High Street, and the neighbouring Parish's Restaurant – both of which have been scheduled for demolition.

The showroom was badly damaged by a Blitz raid in 1940.

The Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton was controversially demolished in 2001 but could be revived as a 1950s watering hole to inform visitors about changes in social attitudes towards drinking and social life.

A bowling green could also form part of the attraction, as could a brickworks modelled on



The Harris & Pearson building, in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill

the former Harris & Pearson site in Quarry Bank. The museum's chief executive Andrew Lovett said he was excited about the proposed town, plans for which are the culmination of a major research project.

He said: "This would be a historic development centred on the 1940s through to the 1960 and which would include a town and also great industrial representation."

"The buildings we have identified would be clustered and we have had great fun designing the streetscape. When was the last time someone got to design a town in the Black Country?"

"We think we have got a very compelling bid for the funding but you have to recognise it is a very competitive environment in which we are seeking the money."

"The message I want to get across which has come about from consultations is about the amount of support we have had for the development from the people of the Black Country. It is hugely heartening for us. It is easy to forget and take that sort of thing for granted but it is a real boost to think we are doing the right thing."

Another building which has been identified for the town is William Griffin & Sons, a chain-making firm in Woods Lane, Cradley, which has also been earmarked for demolition by Sandwell Council.

It would be used to demonstrate the industry's move to merchandised production and the globalisation of trade during the post-war period.

But Mr Lovett said he was most excited by the prospect of relocating Woodside Library with action having being sought by campaigners for several years.

He added: "Having had discussion with the local authority we are aware there is a covenant on that building from the Earl of Dudley who wanted it to be maintained for public use."

"So if that can be brought here it would be great and it would satisfy that covenant."

"It is a large and very striking building and is very much of the style we are after for what we want to create."

A decision on the funding will be made in the spring. If successful, the £10m would be used to create the town, a new visitor centre and car park, as well as the extension of the museum's tram line.

There are also plans to turn the current Rolfe Street Entrance Building into a new learning centre to enable the development of a new learning programme.

Mr Lovett said the scheme could create 93 jobs at the museum, 58 at other Black Country firms and around 450 while construction takes place.



Woodside Library, Dudley, is earmarked for 'translocation'

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British constitution is alive and kicking

THE UK has long been recognised for having a constitution which is flexible and capable of evolution, unlike many other countries where their constitutions are rigid and fixed because they are enshrined in statute.

This can be seen in the recent Supreme Court case over the question of whether the Government can trigger Article 50 without a further vote of the Westminster Parliament to create a further Act of legislation. It has taken over 20 hours of legal argument over four days to weigh up the merits of the case put forward on both sides.

It is not a question of who is right or wrong, or whether ministers, through executive powers, have the right to use prerogative powers which are reserved to the crown in order to trigger Article 50. In the words of the President of the Supreme Court, Lord Neuberger "we are not being asked to overturn the results of the EU Referendum... the ultimate question in this case concerns the process by which the result can lawfully be brought into effect."

We will know the outcome of the case in January next year. This constitutional debate has reinforced to me as

a lawyer that the British constitution is alive and kicking.

The British constitution has allowed impartial judges to consider a case brought by individuals challenging a decision made by ministers in Government to determine whether or not that decision was lawful. This case demonstrates, regardless of who is right or wrong in this matter, that democracy and individual rights can be freely and openly expressed in Britain.

COLIN RODRIGUES
Hawkins Hatton Corporate Lawyers Ltd, Dudley

Antics of reality TV in bad taste

REGARDING 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here' I have only ever watched a small part of one episode some years ago. Then some poor creature was being eaten, but the really sickening part about it was the total disregard for the suffering of the animal.

The message being portrayed is that unless an animal has the 'cute factor' it has no value. Is this really what we want our children to believe? You try to bring them up to have respect and consideration for all creatures and then this revolting barbarism is churned out as entertainment. Everyone involved in the making of this programme should be thoroughly ashamed.

I am amazed that the RSPCA have not done something about it. Of course though the other message being sent out loud and clear is that if enough money or fame is involved basically anything goes.

SUSAN CLARKE
Stourbridge

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

Dudley Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
51-53 Queen Street
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL

dudley.chrons@
expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Council just don't learn from mistakes

DUDLEY Council, over the years, has wasted an awful lot of money, yet the councillors have not learned anything, have they?

In Stone Street there was a small but very useful car park. The council altered it and decided to rename it the 'town square'. It has only been used for this purpose occasionally. Yet this year they have stuck the Christmas tree there. Why? How many visitors to the town centre know that it is there?

Around the town, there are numerous 'plaques' that are supposed to tell people the history of the town. Several times I have spoken to people who have not even noticed them. I asked if there would be leaflets to back up the plaques, and was told 'they are being prepared'. This was way back at the beginning of the summer. Has anyone seen them yet?

And who is the bloke sitting on the bench outside of the bakery? There is, on the bench, writing that explains who he is but it is not easy to read.

Now the council want to waste yet more money that they haven't got.

PETER COLE
Kingswinford

You have never had it so good

THE talk of today's so-called poverty, in relation to that of the 1920s, gives vent to comparisons of then and now.

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The hand-me-down clothes were compulsory. There were no fridge freezers, only the frost on the inside of your bedroom windows. No benefits, no work, no pay, no dough, no eat!

Today's kids have no idea of that world of real poverty. They have no concept of the hardship after the Great War.

I remember stories from my grandmother, who told me that hungry kids would be given a pebble to suck on, thus creating saliva to appease a starving young stomach.

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Dancers delight in annual theatre show



Members of the Denise Robinson Dance school get ready for the annual Christmas show, Dance Your Own Music, in Sedgley. ELVES and fairies were rocking around the Christmas tree for two high-kicking dance shows when the Denise Robinson Dance School held its annual festive shows in Sedgley at the weekend. The Dance Your Own Music show, with just under 70 dancers, was held at Mill Theatre on Saturday and Sunday. Tap, ballet, stage and acrobatic dancers performed to a wide variety of music for the annual by the school, which is in its 49th year. Teacher Denise Robinson said: "The group are aged from three to their 30s. It's been very busy but I wouldn't change it for the world."

Event boosts aid for Yemen

A FUNDRAISING drive across Dudley, Sandwell and Birmingham saw more than 450 people coming together to raise money for people suffering in war-torn Yemen.

Birmingham-based SABA Relief raised £65,000 for humanitarian aid to one of the Arab world's poorest countries, where a brutal civil war has led to the risk of famine.

Zaid Hassan, one of the SABA Relief trustees, said: "It's an amazing achievement and the first time we've raised this much. It's nice to see the communities coming together. People are starving over there and need a lot of support."

SABA will now use the money to deliver basic food parcels to communities where people are at risk of starvation. Head of the fundraiser Mohammed Naji said: "What was really impres-

sive is the response of people from Sandwell, Dudley, Birmingham, and Halesowen, and communities from as far as Liverpool took part and supported the cause."

The Yemeni ambassador to the UK attended a charity dinner earlier this month and boxer Kid Galahad also showed his support at the dinner.

The UN estimate 250,000 children are at risk from malnutrition and poor sanitation in Yemen.

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Filming kicks off on the Duncan Edwards movie



Actor James Ayling as Duncan Edwards during the filming of *The Boy Who Had It All* about the Dudley-born football legend

THE shirt is Manchester United, the player is Duncan Edwards – Dudley's much loved footballing son.

Actor James Ayling is playing the sporting hero in a low-budget film being shot in the town. The 24-year-old from Sheffield certainly looks the part. The film – *The Boy Who Had It All* – focuses on the life of Edwards, from growing up in Dudley to his success at Manchester United.

The footballer, who also played for England, died from injuries sustained in the Munich Air Disaster in 1958,

when aged just 21. Yorkshireman James, who now lives in Essex, was chosen for the role over 40 other applicants for the film, which has a budget of £5,000 after a successful fundraising project.

Although he can boast a similar athletic body thanks to semi-pro appearances in hockey, filmmaker Marcus Distant said his actor's main difficulty was picking the Black Country accent.

The movie maker said: "The one thing we have had to work on is his accent, which at first came across quite northern. But, after some work we've got him sounding like a Dudley man."



Duncan Edwards – 1950s football hero

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Motorist in collision avoids jail despite stolen van lie

AN ELECTRICIAN told police his van had been stolen, after it had crashed into a tree with him at the wheel.

Simon Rowe had used his works van to pick up a takeaway to share with his then partner but careered into a tree in Priory Road, Dudley, after then abandoned the vehicle in a 'dangerous' state.

Rowe lied to officers, telling them the van had been stolen, before later admitting his guilt, prosecutor Neil Ahuja told Wolverhampton Crown Court. He said: "Shortly after 10.30pm on May 18, officers were called to a road traffic collision where a vehicle had been abandoned. There was significant damage to the van and the tree.

Help charity with holidays for disabled

CHARITY Sense is calling for volunteers from the West Midlands to help out with a short breaks programme which it runs for disabled children.

Launching in February 2017, the short breaks will follow this year's successful programme and will see 30 children and young people experience up to three separate trips away from home over 12 months.

The programme has been praised for the respite it provides for families, and vital developmental benefits for the participants. The breaks are designed to offer the children from the area the chance to make new friends, increase their independence and try new activities, from outdoor trails to cookery classes.

Eleanor Coker, of Sense, said: "You could be kayaking, horse riding, camping, whilst making a big difference to the children we support and their families."

Visit www.sense.org.uk or call 020 7520 0962.

He told his partner at the time what had happened and that he was thinking about telling the police that the van had been stolen but she didn't want anything to do with the incident and wouldn't be involved in the lie. Mr Ahuja added: "He was arrested by police and he told them during interview that his partner was lying because she was bitter over a previous break up."

The father-of-two pleaded guilty to perverting the course of justice, driving without due care and attention and failing to surrender to police bail.

Rowe was given a fourth-month jail sentence, suspended for two years. He was also disqualified from driving for 18 months, ordered to pay £500 in fines and costs and to carry out 50 hours of unpaid work.

Judge Nicholas Webb told Rowe: "You are very lucky not to be going to prison."

Bishop backed feed families appeal



The Bishop of Dudley the Rt Rev Graham Usher with donated goods

THE need for food banks means the Black Country faces a "big problem", says the Bishop of Dudley, who backed the Feed a Family This Christmas appeal.

The Right Reverend Graham Usher donated boxes of food and toiletries that he collected himself for the appeal run by The Chronicle's sister newspaper the Express & Star.

The bishop is the latest well-known face to support the campaign which aims to benefit families across the Black Country and Staffordshire.

Well over 3,000 items of food, toiletries and clothing such as socks have been passed on to a number of food banks around the Black Country.

A range of donations, which have included Christmas selection boxes, socks, shower gel and other food items have all been donated by a large number of charitable people and organisations.

The bishop said: "Food banks and people not being able to afford some of the very basics in life is a big problem."

"The Feed a Family appeal is one that goes right to the heart of loving - we're all neighbours and should come together at Christmas time."

"Food banks are still something that are here in our society as people are so stretched financially."

"We have to all come together and look at helping to feed people during this important time."

The Feed a Family appeal ran until December 14, helping the Black Country Food Bank, among others.

Pick up a name for a zoo penguin

DUDLEY Zoo is looking for help to name its penguins.

The zoo has had great success with its colony since it started in 1991 with just five hand-reared birds. It now boasts a headcount of 85 - one of the largest colonies in the UK.

But following a recent check, bird keepers have discovered that 40 of Penguin Bay's residents don't have official names on their record, just identification numbers.

Zoo spokeswoman Andrea Hales, said: "With so many names to think of we decided to let visitors have the job, so we're offering a limited number of penguin adoption packages where adopters can name their animal themselves, which makes it extra special."

"We'll then add the chosen name to the penguin's official records, which will remain with it for its entire lifetime."

An animal's records are kept on the web-based Zoological Information Management System, which is updated regularly with the animal's health, care and wellbeing details.

It can be shared and accessed across the world and is easily at hand by keepers or the zoo's vet.

Prices of the special penguin adoption packages start from £50 and include a certificate, animal factsheet and photo, the quarterly ZooNoz newsletter and a zoo admission ticket.

Service is recruiting student paramedics

VACANCIES for student paramedic roles are to open with the West Midlands Ambulance Service.

There will be 300 places on offer with positions available in Black Country, Birmingham, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Coventry and Warwickshire.

The service will receive applications until January 8. For further details on applying for the roles contact recruitment@wmas.nhs.uk

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Ladies' gym wins top fitness award

A GYM for women in the Black Country has been named a winner at a prestigious fitness industry awards ceremony.

Fitness 4 Ladies in Castle Hill, Dudley, beat strong competition and was crowned Ladies Only Gym of the Year at the National Fitness Awards.

The awards, now in their seventh year, recognise excellence and achievement in the fitness business.

To scoop the trophy, the gym went through a rigorous assessment process, which involved being visited by a member of a workout team who examine all areas of the business, from member retention to customer service.

Support

Owner Raj Kaur, said: "It's an absolute privilege to be recognized nationally for all of our hard work.

"We couldn't have done it without the support of our team and members over the past six and a half years. It was a complete surprise when they named our gym ladies gym of the year and we're all really pleased with the win."

Awards were handed out in more 20 categories at a glittering ceremony at Leicester Athena, attended by more than 850 people and hosted by boxing legend Ricky Hatton and TV celebrity Katie Bulmer-Cooke.

Judith Halkerston, National Fitness Awards' director: "This years winners should be very, very proud.

"The high standard of entries made it a tough job to select a final shortlist never mind a winner and runner-up in each category.

"Our awards' night was a great celebration of the fitness industry as a whole and it was great to see so many gyms represented at the event.

"It was a wonderful evening and it was lovely to share in the celebrations of the winners."

Killer dies in jail on anniversary of murder

A HUSBAND who bludgeoned his wife to death in their Netherton home has been found dead in prison – on the first anniversary of her murder.

Paul Abbott was jailed for life with a 15-year minimum term earlier this year after he admitted murdering his wife Jackie.

The brutal attack saw him strike her at least 16 times with a hammer while chasing her around their home in Netherton on December 11 last year.

Prison chiefs have said Abbott was found dead in a Worcestershire jail on Sunday, one year to the day that he had killed his wife of 28 years.

The 57-year-old was jailed at Wolverhampton Crown Court in July, after admitting murder.

On Tuesday a Prison Service spokesman confirmed Abbott's death and said an independent probe into the circumstances is under way.

Investigation

The spokesman said: "HMP Long Lartin prisoner Paul Abbott died in custody on Sunday, December 11. As with all deaths in custody there will be an independent investigation by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman."

The court heard about Abbott's gambling, jealousy and controlling behaviour. It emerged his wife had also been the victim of 'sporadic' violence from him, culmi-



Paul Abbott – died in jail

nating in the frenzied attack which killed her at their home in Lodge Crescent.

Gambling losses and a row over tickets to an Elvis tribute act sparked the ferocious assault on his wife

The couple ran a business in Brierley Hill selling fishing, darts and snooker equipment with their two sons.

It was the sons who found their 54-year-old mother's bloodstained body in the back garden of the family home.

Former labourer is on course for career at sea

A 20-year-old from Dudley is on course for a career at sea having completed the first stage of his Royal Navy training.

Trainee seaman specialist, Louis Ralston joined the service in October, arriving at HMS Raleigh, Cornwall, for his basic training. He has now completed an intensive 10-week course.

The former High Arcal pupil previously worked as a labourer and in a fast-food restaurant while studying at college. He said: "I joined the Royal Navy for new challenges and to travel the world. I've learnt a lot about myself."



The award-winning team from the Fitness 4 Ladies gym at Castle Hill, Dudley, led by business owner Raj Kaur

Minister promises more Midlands road and railway projects

THE Government is committed to boosting infrastructure in a bid to ensure the West Midlands maintains its position as a major part of the UK's economy, says Brexit Minister David Jones.

During a visit to the Black Country, Mr Jones said the Government was 'fully aware' of the need for major improvements to the region's road network, adding that key developments were in the pipeline.

He met with members of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce's Brexit Policy Group at Carvers, Wolverhampton, where his comments were welcomed by business bosses.

They urged Mr Jones to make sure the West Midlands is not left behind in Downing Street's plans for post-Brexit Britain.

Concern

Mr Jones said: "It is clear that transport is a major area of concern in the West Midlands. We understand the importance of improvements and it is an issue that we will be looking at closely. This is particularly true for the road infrastructure, with the M6 Toll, and also upgrading routes to and from Birmingham Airport."

Mr Jones said the Government would be announcing some major developments for the West Midlands as part of a £2 billion investment for infrastructure upgrades that was announced in the Autumn Statement.

"We have got some major pieces that we are pursuing, including HS2. There will be more projects to be announced in future following consultation."

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14 Remember dementia at Christmas

Dudley Chronicle Thursday, December 22, 2016

FRESH research by Alzheimer's Society found that more than half of people affected by dementia find Christmas to be the most isolating time of the year, with many saying they are dreading the festivities.

Lee Allen, services manager at Alzheimer's Society in the Black Country, calls for the community to consider the needs of people with the condition even more at this time of year.

He said: "While for many this time of year is full of excitement, we must not forget that dementia doesn't stop at Christmas and feelings such as isolation and confusion can be intensified during this time of year."

"Alzheimer's Society is here to support people affected by dementia to cope in the lead up to Christmas. From not overloading the dinner plate to allocating a quiet room where people with dementia can find solace during busy times, our guidance on how to support people during the festive season will empower people to make small steps to have a better experience."

To support families affected by dementia particularly at this time of year, Alzheimer's Society has created an infographic - www.alzheimers.org.uk/supportatchristmas - which has guidance about coping with Christmas.

Winson Green hit by a major prison riot

MANY inmates at Winson Green prison were being moved to other jails after a major riot at the Birmingham prison. The cause of the trouble has not yet been established, with reports blaming a lack of TV, closure of the gym and privileges being withdrawn at the 1,450-capacity prison run by private firm G4S. The firm handed control back to the Prison Service on Friday afternoon as a 'Tornado Squad' was sent in to restore order.

Return of the age of the train as passenger numbers rise

Raise a glass to these boys after cup win



Stourbridge celebrate in the dressing room at Amblecote after the FA Cup win over Northampton took them to the third round facing a Premier League side still very much alive.

A win at High Wycombe on January 7 would see Stour get a further wind-fall of more than £70,000.

The match looked to be heading for a replay when college student Jack Duggan's 86th minute winner sparked jubilant celebrations among the crowd of more than 2,500 who witnessed the biggest cup upset of the season so far.

Fans invaded the pitch at the final whistle eager to celebrate with their heroes.

Celebrities at the ground included Led Zeppelin star Robert Plant along with Miles Hunt from The Wonder Stuff.

Boss Gary Hackett called it a 'proud night' for the non-league club and took aim at the BBC for choosing not to screen the game. Chairman Andy Poutney said the lack of recognition drove the team on. He added: "We were completely dismissed by live TV. It wasn't hard to get the lads up for it, we said 'they don't think we're going to beat Northampton'."

THE number of people catching trains across the Black Country and Staffordshire has increased by nearly seven per cent in the last year, new figures reveal.

There were 20.375 million 'entries and exits' at stations across the region in 2015/16, up from 19.081 million the year before. Of the region's 33 railway stations, just three saw their overall visitors decline during that time. According to the estimates of the usage by the Office of Rail and Road, Cannock station was visited by 221,124 people in 2014/15 but a total of 220,290 travellers over the last year.

Cannock could benefit from £76m work which will see electrification of the Chase Line, which runs from Rugeley to Walsall. That should be completed by next December.

Wolverhampton railway station, which is operated by Virgin Trains, saw 4.746m visitors in 2015/16 - an increase of 5.6 per cent from 2014/15's total of 4.495m.

Junction

Dudley's busiest station, Stourbridge Junction, saw an increase to 1.434m. It rose from 1.323m and showed an 8.3 per cent rise.

Rowley Regis, which was the busiest in Sandwell, was used by 1.015m passengers after 921,116 people used it in 2014/15. People using Walsall rose to 1.404m from 1.303m in 2014/15 - a 7.7 per cent increase.

Usage of Stafford station also rose, from 2.119m to 2.228m.

Steve Wright from independent campaign group Railfuture said: "We are very enthusiastic about rail in the West Midlands and it is generally accepted that the growth in the West Midlands is growing more quickly than anywhere else in the country."

"We are looking forward to the next franchise, which is due in July next year for October next year. That may see some significant improvements in (journey) frequency."

Rieu concert postponed due to illness

THE concert by Dutch violinist Andre Rieu and his orchestra due to be held at the Genting Arena at the NEC last night (Wednesday) has been postponed after one of his musicians suffered a heart attack.

Mr Rieu, who is one of the biggest stars of easy listening music, said: "Many of my orchestra members have been with me for more than 25 years. We are a family. We are deeply saddened by this tragic event and it is impossible for us to continue our tour as planned."

"Thank you all so much for your understanding in this difficult moment."

Customers are advised to retain their ticket for the rescheduled show as all tickets will remain valid for the new dates.

If customers are unable to attend the rescheduled date, full refunds will be available from the point of sale.

Concerts in Nottingham, London, Manchester and Glasgow have also been postponed.



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Honour for sex health pioneer

THE founder of Sandwell and Dudley's sexual health service has been honoured in the BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour Power List.

Helen Brook, founder of Brook, the UK's leading sexual health and wellbeing charity for young people, was one of seven women named in this year's list which celebrates women who have made the biggest impact on women's lives.

The first Brook clinic opened in 1964 offering support and contraception to unmarried women and reducing illegal abortions. This clinic, unlike the Family Planning Association where she had previously worked, was not required to confine its service to women who were married or about to be married.

Helen Brook died in 1997. Today Brook has nine services in Sandwell and Dudley.

£17m raised from parking fees and fines in five years

COUNCILS across the Black Country and Staffordshire have made nearly £17 million on parking over the last five years.

The City of Wolverhampton Council came out highest on the list with a £5,097,000 surplus produced from council parking operations between 2011-2016. It placed Wolverhampton100 out of the national list of 353 councils. The next highest was Lichfield council which also made more than £5m.

The figures come from the statutory annual returns councils make to the Department for Communities and Local Government and are the result of parking operations, including charges and penalty notices, deducting running costs.

In the 2015-16 financial year alone Wolverhampton council had a surplus of £1.8m and desecrobed the figures as 'modest', pointing out that, by law, any surplus from parking enforcement had to be reinvested into transportation projects.

Dudley Council, who had a surplus of £2.3m,

maintain they have more on-street car parking than any other local council.

Councillor Hilary Bills, Dudley's cabinet member for environmental services, said: "Dudley has more free on-street car parking than any neighbouring council. We take steps to encourage free parking in our town centres, where possible, including offering free parking in the town centres on three Saturdays in the run up to Christmas. With central government funding continuing to reduce, we are using all of our funds in the most efficient and effective way possible for the benefit of local people."

Police crimes are revealed

ASSAULTS, drink-driving, misusing computers and allowing dogs to worry sheep – almost 50 West Midlands police officers have been cautioned or convicted of criminal offences over the past three years.

The list of 46 offenders include police constables, special constables and police sergeants.

A Freedom and Information Request has also revealed what action the officers faced after misconduct hearings. That included dismissal, resignation and management action. Some are still yet to be dealt with.

Since 2014, 28 police officers have been dismissed. Seven have resigned, while six faced management action or a written warning.

Grannies get Grand Prix invite



Internet stars the Black Country's dancing grannies are flying out for a gig in Bahrain

THE Black Country's Dancing Grannies are moving into the fast lane of high-powered Formula One racing.

The Grannies, the creation of comedy group, the Fizzogs, have been booked to perform at the Bahrain Grand Prix from April 14 to 16 next year.

The gyrating geriatrics, who will also feature in the Fizzogs forthcoming Suck It and See Tour, caught the eye of a talent scout from the Middle East at the Edinburgh Fringe during the summer.

Fizzog Deb Nicholls said: "The Grannies were performing their routine in the street outside our venue, when we were approached by someone who gave us a business card and asked us to get in touch.

"After an exchange of emails we were eventually booked to perform five 20 minute sessions during the Grand Prix. It's quite

amazing what a widespread audience the Grannies have attracted.

"Appearing in Bahrain will be something new and very special. I just hope they behave themselves."

The Grannies have become a global phenomenon and their routine has been viewed more than 300 million times on social media around the world.

They have also been booked for events throughout the UK.

The Fizzogs' Suck It and See show will continue at venues including the Crescent Theatre in Birmingham (January 12 to 14), Rose Theatre in Kidderminster, The Theatre on the Steps in Bridgnorth and Stafford Gatehouse Theatre in the New Year.

All the tour details and ticket bookings can be found at www.thefizzogs.com website.

High numbers use airport at Christmas

SOARAWAY passenger figures are seeing Birmingham Airport heading into its biggest ever festive period.

Around half-a-million passengers are expected to jet away to visit family or friends or just for a touch of winter sun over the upcoming Christmas fortnight.

It comes hot on the heels of another record-breaking month for the West Midlands gateway, which has enjoyed a blockbuster 2016.

Nearly 780,000 passengers travelled through the airport in November. In total 779,583 passengers were recorded giving an increase of 12.5 per cent compared to the same month last year – equivalent to 86,550 more people. Both long and short haul saw similar levels of growth with long haul up 13 per cent and short haul up 12.6 per cent year-on-year. Paul Kehoe, chief executive, said: "We are now celebrating our 21st consecutive month of record-breaking growth."

Footpath to get revamp

A FOOTPATH leading to a popular nature reserve will be revamped as part of a £94,000 project.

The 500-metre length of path between Arnheim Way and Tame Road which leads to Sheepwash Nature Reserve in Great Bridge is due to be improved.

Sandwell Council environment boss Councillor David Hosell said: "This is a popular, well-used footpath. We hope by making it safer and easier to use, more people will enjoy the nature reserve."

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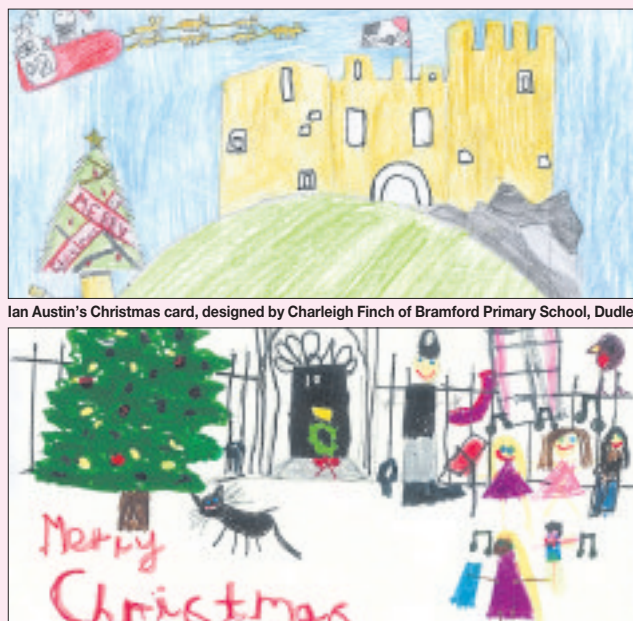
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Philip Hammond's card, featuring his dogs, Rex and Oscar



Ian Austin's Christmas card, designed by Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School, Dudley



Gavin Williamson's card, by Amelie Moseley of Corbett CE Primary School



MP Mike Wood's card, designed by Maidensbridge Primary Schools pupil Alex Maher



John Spellar's card, given an extra bit of festive pizzazz thanks to Photoshop



Emma Reynolds' card, designed by Perry Hall Primary School pupil Kit Lewis

MPs play their cards right for Christmas

FROM stunning images of Parliament, to schoolchildren's drawings and a pair of lovable pooches decked out in festive scarves – MPs have some novel ways of spreading the Christmas cheer.

While some politicians stick to the standard House of Commons issue cards, others run competitions among local school children which can last for months and garner hundreds of entries.

Gavin Williamson chose the latter route, despite having had a busier year than most having been appointed the Government's Chief Whip by Theresa May.

The winning design, by Amelie Moseley from Corbett CE Primary School, Bobbington, features a London bus, a snowman and the ubiquitous Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben.

It will be sent out to around 700 people, although Mr Williamson is taking extra care not to forget his own parents as he did last year.

"I sent all the cards out but completely forgot to send my mum and dad one," he said.

"This year I'm determined to make sure everyone gets one, although I've already signed so many of them I feel like my right hand's about to fall off."

Adorned

Labour's **Emma Reynolds** launched a competition for pupils at eight schools. Of the hundreds of entries the Wolverhampton North East MP picked a design by Kit Lewis, 10, who attends Perry Hall Primary School.

The card, which features a drawing of a Christmas tree adorned with a star, has been sent out to more than 600 people.

Ms Reynolds said: "I think the image is very striking. This was the biggest competition I have ever run and the standard of entries was the best yet."

Dudley North MP **Ian Austin** sends out hundreds of Christmas cards, with the Queen and the Prime Minister among the recipients.

After a contest among local school children that garnered hundreds of entries, Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School produced the winning design that adorns the front of his card.

The winning entry shows a Christmas scene with Santa flying over with Dudley Castle.

Mr Austin presented Charleigh with her chosen prize at a school assembly. He said: "It was a huge privilege to go to Bramford Primary and present her with an award for her design skills."

Runners up could choose from early Christmas gifts including a family ticket to Dudley Zoo and Castle, a family ticket to the Black Country Museum and gift vouchers for Hobbycraft.

Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP **James Morris**, who has been busy hitting the streets with the local Rotary club's charity sleigh, ran a contest among local school children for the sixth consecutive year and had 600 entries to sift through.

The winning card was designed by Year 6 pupil Ruby Field, from Our Lady & St Kenelm Primary School, Halesowen, and features a family gathering around a Christmas tree. Mr Morris



Aldridge-Brownhills MP Wendy Morton's card features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese in the snow, taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club



MP James Morris, with pupil Ruby Field and her winning design

said: "This is the fifth year that I have asked local primary schools to design my Christmas card and I am always impressed with the quality and variety of entries."

"Well done to Ruby and to the runners-up, as well as to everybody who sent in such fantastic entries, and a big thank you to all of the teachers and staff who encouraged their classes to take part."

Dudley South's Tory MP **Mike Wood** opened up his competition to pupils at all primary and special school pupils in his constituency.

And in a novel twist, he put the best seven entries up online for members of the public to vote on. The winner was Alex Maher, a Year 5 pupil at Maidensbridge Primary School, Wall Heath, who impressed the MP with his drawing of a Robin in a Santa hat. Warley MP

John Spellar got creative with his card this year. He used a picture of Elizabeth Tower, with a Christmas tree in the foreground, and enhanced it using Photoshop.

Aldridge-Brownhills MP **Wendy Morton** went with a local theme for her card. It features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese wandering by through the snow.

The shot was taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club, while Walsall North MP **David Winnick** has sent out one of the Commons' official selection cards chosen by the Commons Speaker John Bercow.

His colleague in Walsall South, **Valerie Vaz**, also picked a card with a parliamentary theme.

The shadow leader of the House of Commons' card features a photograph of a beau-



Another traditional Christmas card sent out by Pat McFadden and Valerie Vaz



Wolverhampton MP Rob Marri's traditional Christmas card

tifully decorated tree in Old Palace Yard with Elizabeth Tower in the background.

"It's such an iconic image," she said. "A lot of staff gave up a Sunday for free to put all the lights on the tree, which I think was a wonderful gesture."

Wolverhampton South East MP **Pat McFadden** sent the same card. He said: "It is a wonderful time of year, but it can get quite exhausting when you have about 700 cards to send."

Wolverhampton MP **Rob Marri** chose a striking image of the Houses of Parliament for his card.

Meanwhile Labour may have accused Philip Hammond of barking up the wrong tree with his Autumn Statement, but the Chancellor has shown he can bite back with an adorable card featuring his two mutts, Rex and Oscar.

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Horse and carts adorn this street scene, of Lower High Street



The up-and-coming game of tennis soon caught on in Wednesbury



Cricket in Wednesbury was very much part of the town's social scene



Tony Highfield at Darlaston Library with the new book 'Ryder's Annual', highlighting the Black Country's past

Book offers a glimpse of life in 19th century

IT has taken a year to put together, but now people have the chance to glimpse into the past and get their hands on a very special piece of Black Country history.

The Very Best of Ryder's Annual book has been put together by Bev Parker and Tony Highfield. The book features some of the stories and pictures from the well-known Ryder's Annual, that was first published in the 19th century.

The book charts Wednesbury's history from 1878 to 1918 and goes some way in illustrating the people of the town's contribution to the war effort.

Tony Highfield, aged 74, of Bloxwich revealed how he first came up with the idea for the book. He said: "I was walking down Darlaston High Street when a friend of mine, Joan Bytheway, came up to me and said she had been given some old books for a jumble sale."

"She asked whether I'd like to see

MEMORY LANE

Report by Jessica Labhart

them. I said I would and when I went round there and saw them, I couldn't believe it. The books were two extremely rare Ryder's Annuals.

"I asked if I could borrow them, which I was told I could, and then I spoke to Bev about them."

"We decided to begin putting a book together on the best of the annuals, and went and visited Wednesbury Library to look at their archive of annuals, too."

The book was launched on December 3 at Wednesbury Library then at Darlaston Library on December 10. Mindful Gifts CIC, based on Church Street, Darlaston, a not-for-profit organisation, is also sponsoring the book as it specialises in gifts and activities for people with dementia.

It is hoped that the book will provide an insight into the life and times of local people's ancestors. The book

also contains an almanac devoted to the First World War.

Mr Highfield said: "I just think it is so interesting to see the lives of the people in the book."

"People might be able to find their ancestors in there, old businesses, churches, groups, clubs and societies." In the introduction of the book, Bev Parker states: "The Ryder Annuals offer a unique insight into life in a successful and rapidly developing area. They feature images of the town's dignitaries, industrialists, councillors, photographs of the town centre and countless adverts describing Black Country businesses."

Mr Highfield added: "I always get people coming up to me saying they wish they'd spoken to their grandmothers and grandfathers about local history and their ancestors."

"What I'd say is, this book gives you an idea of what life was like back then, but do speak to granny, before it's too late, and share some of those memories and stories together."

The book costs £9.99.



Miners from Wednesbury on shift at a local colliery, seen in the cage which leads down the shaft

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At the height of their fame, the foursome leaving for America



Slade later in their career in party mood



Fans meet Don at his first home on Green Park Road, Bilston



A new look after the band had left behind their skinhead days



Drummer Don Powell.

Pictures: Barry Plummer



Slade at Heathrow airport, ready to fly out in 1972



Glam rock personified, with Dave Hill's glittery look

Slade come Bak 'Ome to celebrate 50 merry years

REPORT BY JORDAN HARRIS

BLACK Country glam rock and roll icons Slade returned to where it all began, to look back on 50 years of glory.

They are a band synonymous with good times whose energy-packed anthems still rattle with the same electricity as when they were first released.

Last Friday marked Slade's 50th anniversary, and to mark the milestone a show was held at The Robin 2, the live music venue in Bilston which has become the band's spiritual home over the years.

While the current Slade live experience might miss the inimitable howl of Noddy Holder on lead vocals, it has become a celebration of the band's spirit, which has always been one of its key features.

It certainly takes a lot of spirit for four young Black Country lads to visualise a life of Technicolor glam rock in front of them while rehearsing in Bilston.

But listening back to the early recordings, they prove they were hellbent on harnessing the escapist power of music in order to change their lives.

Fashion

Once the band got its foot in the door, there was no stopping them.

Noddy Holder, Don Powell, Dave Hill and Jim Lea became household names, with songs such as Take Me Bak 'Ome and Mama Weer All Crazee Now taking them to the top of the charts.

However, it wasn't just the music that caught people's attention and sold millions of records. As the band racked up an incredible 17 consecutive top 20 hits, they became notorious for song title mis-spellings, the rock and roll attitude of its stars and a unique sense of fashion.

The greatest example of this is Noddy's famous mirrored top hat, a symbol of the excess and brashness of the times which no one else would dare attempt to pull off.

Dave Hill also indulged with fashion excesses. He favoured silver and gold outfits with massive platform boots.

The band's best-selling single, and last number one, is the festive anthem Merry Xmas Everybody, which has become so attached to this time of year it is hard to imagine going through December without hearing it.

In a way, it is a perfect representation of the band at their peak, an unashamedly joyful song that reaches out to the masses with open arms. Their peak years were such a blaze of glory that it was inevitable that



The band at the height of their powers in the early 1970s when they were always in the charts and on Top of the Pops almost every week



In 2002 Slade received University of Wolverhampton fellowships



Noddy leading from the front as always with an outrageous tie

a dip would come and as the world around them changed and punk arrived in the 70s, their popularity began to fade. These are the times when a band's character is truly tested, after the fame and glory, without the energy of youth on their side and drained from years of touring and partying.

It wasn't long before they were back in

the hearts and minds of the public, with a performance at Reading Festival in 1980 bringing Slade to a new audience. That would be done again years later when Oasis shouted their appreciation for the band from the rooftops, even covering Cum On Feel The Noize.

Don released his autobiography Look Wot

I Dun in 2013 and his childhood home at Bilston was chosen for a visit by fans at a Slade convention in 2015.

But last Friday's show was all about looking back on the good times and the bad, reliving songs that are part of the Black Country's heritage, the fashion choices that continue to raise eyebrows and the connec-

Look wot you dun boys – nearly two million sales in the UK



In Flame, also their movie

IN the UK, the band has sold a certified 520,000 albums...

Beginnings as Ambrose Slade, 1969; Play It Loud 1970; Slayed? 1972; Old New Borrowed and Blue 1974; Slade in Flame 1974; Nobody's Fools 1976.

Whatever Happened to Slade 1977; Return to Base 1979; We'll Bring the House Down 1981; Till Deaf Do Us Part 1981.

The Amazing Kamikaze Syndrome 1983, re-released in 1984. Rogues Gallery 1985; Crackers – The Christmas Party Album 1985; You Boyz Make Big

Noize 1987. Keep on Rockin' 1994 – as Slade II, re-released in 2002.

Slade sold a staggering 1.8 million singles...

1969, Wild Winds Are Blowing. 1970, Shape of Things to Come, Know Who You Are.

1971, Get Down and Get with It, Coz I Luv You, Look Wot You Dun.

1972, Take Me Bak 'Ome, Mama Weer All Crazee Now, Gudbuy T'Jane.

1973, Cum On Feel the Noize, Skweeze Me, Pleeze Me, My Friend Stan, Merry Xmas Everybody.

1974, Everyday, The Bangin' Man,

Far Far Away.

1975, How Does It Feel, Thanks for the Memory, Wham Bam Thank You Mam, In for a Penny.

1976, Let's Call It Quits, Nobody's Fool.

1977, Gypsy Roadhog, Burning in the Heat of Love, My Baby Left Me.

1978, Give Us a Goal, Rock 'n' Roll Bolero.

1979, Ginny, Ginny, I'm a Rocker, Sign of the Times, Okey Cokey.

1981, We'll Bring the House Down, Wheels Ain't Coming Down, Knuckle Sandwich Nancy, Lock Up Your

Daughters.

1982, Ruby Red, Rock and Roll Preacher, And Now the Waltz C'est La Vie.

1983, My Oh My, Cum On Feel the Noize, re-issue.

1984, Run Runaway, Slam the Hammer Down, All Join Hands.

1985, 7 Year Bitch, Myzsterious Mizster Jones, Little Sheila, Do You Believe in Miracles.

1987, Still the Same, That's What Friends Are For, You Boyz Make Big Noize, Ooh La La in LA, We Won't Give In.

1988, Let's Dance '88'.



One of Slade's biggest hits

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See Page 22



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Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity



Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee

Am yam ready? Panto fun wish has come true

WHAT a Grand panto... oh yes it is! If you're looking for a festive feast of fun with magical music and tremendous tricks, then the Grand's genie of the lamp will make your wish come true.

It is without doubt the Lichfield Street theatre's best seasonal show for years with a perfect balance of TV talent and seasoned stage performers.

And a star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China. Apparently she had to apply for the

Empress job to keep her benefits and was rather dismayed to get the gig.

Sometimes it means she has to get up before 2pm or miss the Jeremy Kyle show.

With a Black Country accent so thick it could plug the cut, she was an instant hit with panto-goers.

And I suspect Gill Jordan's comic creation will be in demand in panto land (at least in the West Midlands) for years to come.

Joe McDerry is a suitably handsome and dashing Aladdin, and those who saw him on The X Factor, Popstar To Operastar or on stage in Joseph know he has an excellent singing voice.

Further fine vocals come from Britain's Got Talent fi-

nalist Lucy Kay as Princess Jasmine and Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp.

Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee, and Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey.

The scene where the pair get shrunk in the wash was priceless. As Aladdin's washer woman mom, Adams wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity.

And all three of the Twankeys did defy gravity on a stunning magic carpet scene in which Aladdin loops the loop over the heads of a marvellous audience.

Stefan Pejic's Abanazar is an eminently hissable villain in the booming Tom Baker mode, gold-clad Lisa Riley makes for a wisecracking ballroom-dancing Slave of the Ring and CBeebies favourite Ben Faulks is the slapstick PC Ping Pong.

Add a troupe of energetic dancers and a soundtrack full of pop and showtune favourites, and you've got one Christmas cracker of a show.

It's on at the Grand until January 22.

LEON BURAKOWSKI



A star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China



Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp

Snowbody could better this duet

THE Snowman returns to Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the New Year to delight young and old alike from January 11 to 15, with its wonderful mix of storytelling, spectacle, music and magic.

For the first time this year the show will feature a new recording of the iconic song Walking in the Air in which the adult Aled Jones duets with his younger self, in a new arrangement by composer Howard Blake.

The new arrangement features on Aled's latest album One Voice at Christmas, which recently reached number one in the Classic FM charts, and will now also feature in The Snowman on stage.

Aled Jones said: "Walking in the Air caps off such a great year for me and I'm thrilled to give it a new lease of life. Who knows, maybe we'll get to the top of the Christmas chart again!"

Howard Blake said: "This is a unique theatrical event whereby through the wonders of technology one can hear Aled at the age of 12 singing with Aled as the tenor he is now. I am delighted that we can include it in the show."

Based on the book by Raymond Briggs and the film directed by Diane Jackson, the stage show has transported generations of children and their families into the wintry world of a boy and his magical snowman.

The Birmingham Rep production features music and lyrics by Howard Blake performed by a live orchestra,



The Snowman at Birmingham Rep is a traditional wintertime family treat

choreography by Robert North, direction by Bill Alexander, design by Ruari Murchison and lighting by Tim Mitchell.

The enchanting show tells the story of a young boy's adventures when his snowman comes miraculously to life on Christmas Eve. Featuring a daz-

zling array of colourful characters including dancing penguins, magical reindeer, a beautiful snow princess, her wicked beau Jack Frost and of course, Father Christmas himself.

The Snowman is a Christmas treat for all the family and a perfect introduction to theatre for the very young.



Fuller sound for Fall Girl

A SINGER-SONGWRITER has released her first self-produced album. Michelle Sciarrotta, who performs under the name Fall Girl, released debut album Arcana on digital platforms including iTunes, Spotify and Amazon this month.

She says the 11-track album, which was recorded, written and produced in her home studio, gave her a chance to experiment with different styles.

It acts as an expansion to her stripped back live sets, with songs she performs in front of audiences using just her voice and acoustic guitar fleshed out with keyboards, drums and more.

Michelle, originally from Coventry, said: "This has been the first major project I have put together on my own, which is something I have quite enjoyed. It is daunting, because there are times when you miss working with other people. But what you get is the clearest representation of the sound you want in your head, it is less of a committee thing."

Record

Michelle is a classically-trained musician who makes her living from performing, not only as Fall Girl but under her own name with a covers set, as well as working with other musicians including former Wolfsbane rocker Blaze Bayley.

A launch event for physical copies of Arcana was held at record shop Vinyl & Vintage, on Cleveland Street in Wolverhampton. Michelle will play her final show of the year as Fall Girl on December 27 at The Jam House in Birmingham. For more information on Fall Girl, visit www.facebook.com/fallgirlmusic or see fallgirl.net

Make arena dates with rock legends

CLASSIC rock fans can add major gigs in Birmingham to their 2017 diaries. School's Out rocker Alice Cooper will be at the Barclaycard Arena on November 14 with The Mission and The Tubes. Before that, his shock rock rivals Kiss, fronted by Gene Simmons, play the Barclaycard Arena on May 8.

Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow are at the NEC Genting Arena on June 28 and his former colleagues bring Deep Purple to the Barclaycard Arena on November 17. The Who perform Tommy and more at the Barclaycard Arena April 12 and Black Sabbath say farewell at the Genting Arena on February 2 and 4.

Osmonds join Brum festivities

JIMMY Osmond brings his brothers Merrill and Jay to Birmingham Town Hall on Friday in tribute to the late crooner Andy Williams, who launched The Osmonds with his Christmas Extravaganza TV shows.

The festive variety show will also feature Britain's Got Talent ventriloquist Steve Hewlett and singer Charlie Green.

Also on Friday night, singers Laura Tebbutt and Tim Howar join Capital Voices and London Concert Orchestra for White Christmas at the Symphony Hall. The same venue hosts Christmas By Candlelight with the Mozart Festival Orchestra on Christmas Eve afternoon.

Musical nostalgia with tribute bands

GET the festivities going with the sounds of three decades ago with tribute act Kick Up The 80s at Bilston's Robin 2 venue on Friday. Or join The Upbeat Beatles for a Christmas Eve tribute to the Fab Four at the Robin on Saturday.

Also coming up at the Mount Pleasant venue are Thin Lizzy tribute Limehouse Lizzy on Boxing Day night, ska legends Bad Manners on Tuesday and The Dirty DC tribute to Aussie rockers AC/DC on Wednesday.

Turn the clock back to Madchester in the 90s for a triple tribute featuring Definitely Maybe, Adored and Happy Mondays on Thursday (Dec 29).

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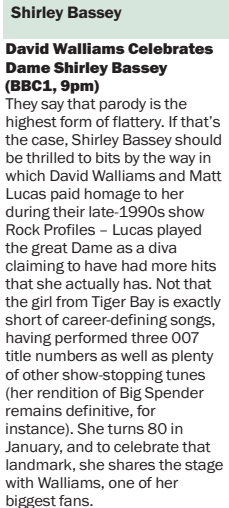
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10.00 Breakfast, 10.00 Saturday Kitchen, 11.30 Film: A Christmas Carol. (2009)
1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.15 Winter: Earth's Seasonal Secrets. **2.15 Film:** The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian. (2008) **4.30 Shark the Halls. (R) 4.50 Film:** Penguins of Madagascar. (2014)
6.15 BBC News.
6.20 Regional Programme.
6.30 Pointless Celebrities. Alexander Armstrong and Richard Osman present a Christmas special of the general knowledge quiz, with Leslie Jones, Duncan James, Faye Tozer, Bobby Davvo and Joe Pasquale.
7.25 Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show. Michael puts a festive spin on his weekend variety entertainment show, with live performances by Alfie Boe, Michael Ball, Catherine Tate and Harry Enfield.
8.25 EastEnders. Phil is given some tough love by both Shirley and Denise, Linda receives disturbing family news and Dot closes up for the final time. Donna is touched by a dinner invitation.
9.00 David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey. The comedy actor hosts this special evening of entertainment in which he performs songs and tells some of her best-loved songs and looks back on her 60 years in showbusiness.
10.05 Peter Kay's Christmas Comedy Shuffle. A festive collection of clips from the comedian's TV Christmas entertaining his guests from Car Share and Phoenix Nights, as well as a seasonal singalong with Paul McCartney.
10.50 The Vicar of Dibley. Alice suggests an unconventional nativity play starring herself and Harry and the new priest, and adds an extra touch of authenticity by going into labour mid-performance. (R)
11.30BBC News; Weather; National Lottery Update.
11.45 Midnight Mass: from St Chad's Birmingham. The Most Rev. Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham, leads a Christmas Eve Midnight Mass broadcast live from St Chad's Cathedral.
1.00 Film: Surviving Christmas. (2004)
2.15 Weather for the Week Ahead. 2.30

15 **Animated:** *Scarsie Needs Moms.* (2011) Film: *Scarsie* in a feud, with the voice of Seth Routh **Dusky** **7.40** **The NFL Show.** (R) **8.10** **Film:** *Has Christ* **Anderson. (1952) Musical, starring Danny Kaye **10.00** **Robert De Niro.** (R) **11.00** **Wallace & Gromit:** *A Close Shave.* (R) **11.30** **Nigella's Christmas Kitchen.** (R) **12.00** **The Cook Who Changed Our Lives. (R) **1.00** **Film:** *Splash!* (1984) Romantic farce comedy, with Tom Hanks and **Dana Delany** **1.30** **Chick:** *A Penguin's Tale.* (R) **3.45** **Gorilla Family and Me.** (R) **4.45** **Gorilla Family and Me.** (R) **5.45** **Carols from King's.******

7.00 **Dad's Army.** The platoon challenges a rifle regiment to a grueling duel, involving map reading, initiative, cross-country, and flag-fighting, to prove they are fitter and better trained than any other troop. Vintage comedy with the bumbling **Home Guard** of **Walmington-on-Sea**, starring **Arthur Lowe**, **John Le Mesurier** and **Jan Lavender** (R).

8.00 **Alan Bennett's Diaries.** A candid profile of the writer, following him in his home village in **Yorkshire**, to his community library in **Primrose Hill**, and during a trip to **New York**. In a series of intimate encounters filmed over the period of a year, he reflects on his modest beginnings and his enduring gratitude to a **Welfare State** that paid for his education and looked after his parents in their old age.

9.00 **Film:** *The Lady in the Van.* (2015) **Premiere.** The true story of writer **Alan Bennett's** friendship with an eccentric homeless woman, whom he befriended in the 1970s before allowing her to park her dilapidated **Bedford van** outside his **Camden** home, where she ended up staying for 15 years. Comedy-drama, starring **Maggie Smith**, **John Henshaw**, **Roger Allam** and **Jim Broadbent.**

10.40 **The National Lottery Live.** The all-important winning numbers are revealed.

10.50 **Christmas TOTPZ Special.** **Mark Radcliffe** presents festive performances from the **Topps** of the **Post Office**, including **Slade, Wham!, Wizard, East 17, Mud**, the **Jackson 5** and **Johnny Mathis.** (R)

12.20 **Film:** *Viva Las Vegas.* (1964) **1.40** **Sign Zone:** *Countryside.* (R) **2.40** **Holy City.** (R) **3.40** **This Is BBC Two.** **Preview**

9.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. 6.30 Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) 6.35 Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) 6.45 Super Dog. (R) 6.55 Signed Stories. (R) 7.05 Sooty. (R) 7.10 10 Oddballs. (R) 7.15 Oddballs. (R) 7.25 Nests & Monsters. (R) 7.40 Nests & Monsters. (R) 7.55 Horrid Henry. (R) 8.10 Horrid Henry. (R) 8.25 Weekend at the Castle. 9.25 Thunderbirds Are Go. 9.50 The Chase. (R) 10.50 You've Been Framed. (R) 11.00 The 100th Anniversary Despicable Me. (H) 1.20 ITV News; Weather. 1.30 Film: Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. (2001) Fantastic adventure, starring Daniel Radcliffe. 4.20 Film: One Hundred and One Dalmatians. (1951) A Disney classic featuring a dog, with the voice of Betty Lou Gerson.

6.00 Regional Programme: Weather.

6.15 ITV News: Weather.

6.30 Blankety Blank. David Walliams presents a one-off special revival of the 1970s game show in which contestants and a panel of celebrities must identify the murder word in three minutes.

7.30 Coronation Street. Aidan admits to Johnny he is in love with Maria while she heads to court, and Nicki feels left out as Peter and Leanne reflect on old times.

8.00 Birds of a Feather. Sharon, Tracey and Helen head to Morocco to track down Travis when he goes missing while on his gap year. Comedy, starring Pauline Quirke, Linda Robson and Lesley Joseph.

9.00 Granchester Christmas Special. It's the week before Christmas, and Sharon and Geraldine are drawn into a case with echoes of an unsolved murder from nine years previously when a bride-to-be reports the disappearance of her groom on their wedding day. Comedy, in the style of *Coronation Street*, starring James Norton, Robson Green, Mervyn Christie and Al Weaver.

10.30 Through the Keyhole. Keith Lemon hosts a Christmas special of the game show, as celebrity panellists Shayne Ward, Kelly Rowland and George Jones are asked to identify the homes of the rich and famous.

11.30 ITV News: Weather.

11.45 Christmas Carols on ITV. Aled Jones joins the congregation of St Chad's church in Rochdale.

12.40 All Star Mr & Mrs Christmas Special. (R) 1.30 Film: Carry On Loving.

15 **Olive, the Other Reindeer. (R) 7.05** Film: A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures. (2010) **8.40** Father Christmas. (R) **9.10** Painting the Bear Hunt. **9.15** Christmas Brunch. **12.15** The Grinch. (R) **12.30** The Simpsons. (R) **1.15** The Simpsons. (R) **1.45** The Simpsons. (R) **2.15** The Simpsons. (R) **2.45** Film: Scrooged. (1988) Christmas comedy, starring Bill Murray. **4.40** Channel 4 News. **4.45** The Snowman. (R) **5.15** The Simpsons. (R) **5.45** The Simpsons. (R) **6.15** The Muppet Christmas Carol. (1992) Puppet comedy, starring Michael Caine.

7.30 **We're Going on a Bear Hunt.** Animated adventure, based on Michael Essex's picture book, children's story of the same name, featuring the voices of Olivia Colman, Pam Ferris and Mark Williams.

8.00 **Gogglesgros Christmas Special.** Young TV viewers appraise the year's television programmes in the first edition of a new big news stories about the American Presidential election to TV's most popular hits, including Strictly Come Dancing, First Dates and The X Factor II.

9.00 **8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown Christmas Special.** Jimmy Carr hosts a festive edition of the comedy panel show, with guests Kathy Burke and Russell Howard joining Sean Lock and Jon Richardson. With Joe Lycett and Joe Wilkinson.

10.00 **Rude Tube Christmas Cracker** **10.16.** Alex Zane and his canine companion Bah Hum-Pup present some of the most popular seasonal internet videos, including a cat-powered Christmas card and a Christmas message from Björk.

11.00 **Trigger Happy Christmas Special.** Dom Joly returns with a festive edition of the hidden-camera show, featuring new characters alongside the "big horrible man", who has a smartphone with apps and video-calling.

11.30 **The Inbetweeners.** The gang goes on the infamous sociology and geography field trip to Swangate, and Will takes a shine to new girl Laura, but she is only interested in Simon. (R)

12.05 **The Inbetweeners. (R) 1.30** Friday Night Dinner. (R) **2.25** The Last Leg Christmas Special. (R) **3.20** My Crazy Christmas Lights. (R) **4.10** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.05** The Restoration

00 *Mike's Place*. **8.30** *SpongeBob SquarePants*. **9.05** *Film: Doctor Zhivago*. **(1952)** **12.50** *Film: The Vikings*. **(1958)** Historical adventure, starring Kirk Douglas and Turgid Curles. **3.05** *Film: Jason and the Argonauts*. **(1963)** Fantasy adventure, starring Todd Armstrong. **5.10** *Film: Scrooge – A Christmas Carol*. **(1951)** Charles Dickens' fantasy, starring Alastair Sim.

6.55 **Andre Rieu: Christmas in London.** A festive concert given by the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Johann Strauss Orchestra in 2015, featuring Christmas carols, popular classical pieces and songs including Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* and the *Concierto de Aranjaz*.

8.00 **The Yorkshire Vet at Christmas.** The veterinary documentary series concludes with a festive trip to Skeldale. Elderly farmer Jean, one of the show's most colourful characters, makes a Christmas cake with ingredients that have been "maturing" for seven years, and Peter Wright feels the worst when he is called to tend to a cow that has collapsed. Back at the surgery, Julia and Peter have to make a difficult decision regarding Barney, a spaniel with a huge, fast-growing tumour on his leg. The residents of Thirsk plan to mark James Herriot's centenary by celebrating his successful career on the festive Christmas lights, but Julia and Peter face a more daunting challenge when they are asked to help find a donkey for the town square nativity scene. Last in the series.

9.00 **Emann & Ruth: A Million Pound Christmas.** Emma Holmes and Ruth Langford discover the most expensive ways in which people can enjoy the season of goodwill, beginning by sampling a £10,000 Christmas dinner.

10.00 **Greatest Ever Christmas Movies.** Countdown of the best festive films, from *It's a Wonderful Life* to *Bad Santa*. Featuring contributions by Gremlins star Zach Galligan and Miracle on 34th Streets' Mara Wilson.

12.55 *Film: Scrooge – A Christmas Carol*. **(1951)** **2.25** *SuperCino*. **4.00** *The Trafford Centre: Countdown to Christmas*. **(R)** **4.50** *House Doctor*. **(R)** **5.20** *Angels of Jarm*. **(R)** **5.25** *Roary the Racing Car*. **(R)** **5.35** *Mike's Place*. **Box Pop** **(R)** **5.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **5.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **5.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **5.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **6.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **7.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **8.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **9.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **10.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **11.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **12.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **13.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **14.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.20** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.25** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.30** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.35** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.40** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.45** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.50** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **15.55** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **16.00** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **16.05** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **16.10** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **16.15** *Box Pop*. **(R)** **16.20**

8:00 **Four All Aboard!** The Sleigh Ride **9.00** Top of the Pops Christmas Hits **10.30** Roy Orbison: One of the Lonely Ones **11.30** Steptoe and Son **12.15** Top of the Pops Christmas **1982** **1.25** Shirley Bassey at the BBC **2.25** Top of the Pops **3.55** Close

ITV2

11.50 The Nation's Favourite Disney Song **12.50** Film: Santa Paws **2.70** The Santa Pups **2.12** 2.35 Film: Mickey's Twice Upon a Christmas (2004) **4.00** The Smurfs: A Christmas Carol **4.25** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **5.25** Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.30** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **6.55** Film: The Polar Express (2004) **9.00** Film: Quantum of Solace (2008) **11.15** Family Guy **12.15** American Dad! **1.40** Celebrity Juice Christmas Special **2.00** Film: Derailed (2005) **2.20** Educating John **2.35** What Are You Sleighing? **5.05** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.30** Christmas Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

11.45 Film: Columbo: The Conspirators (1978) **1.50** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life (1998) **2.50** The Sound of Music Live **3.30** The Making of the Sound of Music Live **4.70** Lewis **9.00** It'll Be Alright on the Night **10.00** Michael Flatley: A Night to Remember **11.00** The Suspicions of Mr Whicher **1.05** Inspector Morse **3.00** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life **4.00** The Sound of Music Live **4.40** The Darling Buds of May **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen

ITV4

12.10 Film: The Searchers (1956) **1.20** FYI Daily **1.25** Film: The Searchers (1956) **2.30** Film: The Searchers (1956) **5.00** Film: Rio Bravo (1959) **7.50** Film: Cannonball Run (1984) **10.00** Film: The Untouchables (1960) **11.00** Advocate (1997) **11.25** Film: Road (2014) **3.30** Hell on Wheels **3.45** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.50** Tommy Cooper **4.15** The Professionals **5.10** Minder **5.30** Minder

ITV4

11.55 Film: A Day of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules (2011) **1.20** Father Christmas **2.35** Pre-Landing **3.30** Pre-Landing **4.00** Naughty & Nice **3.25** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** Film: The Inbetweeners Movie (2011) **1.05** Gogglebox **1.10** Rude Tube Christmas Calendar **2.14** **15** Rude Tube **3.20** Rude Tube **3.30** Rude Tube **3.40** Rude Tube **3.50** Rude Tube **4.00** Rude Tube **4.10** Rude Tube **4.20** Rude Tube **4.30** Rude Tube **4.40** Rude Tube **4.50** Rude Tube **5.00** Rude Tube **5.10** Rude Tube **5.20** Rude Tube **5.30** Rude Tube **5.40** Rude Tube **5.50** Rude Tube **6.00** Rude Tube **6.10** Rude Tube **6.20** Rude Tube **6.30** Rude Tube **6.40** Rude Tube **6.50** Rude Tube **7.00** Rude Tube **7.10** Rude Tube **7.20** Rude Tube **7.30** Rude Tube **7.40** Rude Tube **7.50** Rude Tube **8.00** Rude Tube **8.10** Rude Tube **8.20** Rude Tube **8.30** Rude Tube **8.40** Rude Tube **8.50** Rude Tube **9.00** Rude Tube **9.10** Rude Tube **9.20** Rude Tube **9.30** Rude Tube **9.40** Rude Tube **9.50** Rude Tube **10.00** Rude Tube **10.10** Rude Tube **10.20** Rude Tube **10.30** Rude Tube **10.40** Rude Tube **10.50** Rude Tube **11.00** Rude Tube **11.10** Rude Tube **11.20** Rude Tube **11.30** Rude Tube **11.40** Rude Tube **11.50** Rude Tube **12.00** Rude Tube **12.10** Rude Tube **12.20** Rude Tube **12.30** Rude Tube **12.40** Rude Tube **12.50** Rude Tube

Film4

11.00 Miracle on 34th Street **1.40** Santa Paws **1.15** Arthur Christmas (2011) **3.15** Mr Popper's Penguins (2011) **5.05** Thunderbirds (2004) **6.50** Knight and Day (2010) **9.00** Last Vegas (2013) **11.10** The Transporter (2002) **12.55**

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CHOICE



Peter Capaldi

Doctor Who (BBC1, 5.45pm)
It's been a bleak year for Whovians. Instead of having a full series to enjoy, there's been nothing apart from spin-off series Class. It's been delightful, but it's just not the same as having some Tardis action to get your teeth into. But, as they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder, and as Steven Moffat (who bows out as the showrunner next year) has had an extra 12 months to work on this single episode, we're expecting big things. Not that the BBC is letting fans know too much about it – as with previous episodes, it's only giving away the barest essentials. So we'll see Peter Capaldi's Time Lord travel to New York, where he comes face to face with a mysterious superhero called The Ghost.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **9.00** CBeebies The Nutcracker. **9.45** Legend of the Boneknapper Dragon. (R) **10.00** Christmas Day Service – Live from Bristol Cathedral. **11.00** Songs of Praise: Christmas Big Sing. **11.40** BBC News. Weather. **11.50** Film: The Groods. (2013) **1.20** Shaun the Sheep: The Farmer's Llamas. (R) **1.50** Top of the Pops Christmas. **2.50** BBC News: Weather. **3.00** The Queen's Christmas Broadcast. **3.10** Film: Frozen. (2013) **4.45** The Great Christmas Bake Off. **5.45** Doctor Who. **6.45** **Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special**. Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman host the festive special, with previous contestants Denise Lewis, Frankie Bridge, Pamela Stephenson, Ainsley Harriott, Gethin Jones and Melvin Odoom. **8.00** **Call the Midwife**. Christmas special, in which the nurses of Nonnatus House travel to South Africa to help the struggling staff of a mission clinic faced with closure. Sinead Cusack guest stars. **9.30** **EastEnders**. Any hopes of a merry Christmas seem slim with Phil's health deteriorating rapidly. Lee struggling with the burden of his secrets and the return of none other than Max Branning. **10.30** **Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special**. Grandad's health causes concern, Mrs Brown steps in when a fire at the salon leaves Rory and Dino with nowhere to work, while Dermot faces stiff competition to win a contract. **11.00** **The Best of Tracey Ullman's Show**. Highlights from the comedy sketch show, as well as some brand new material, including a look at what would happen if Clare Balding was left in charge of BBC's Christmas schedules. **11.30** **BBC News**: Weather. **11.45** **On Christmas Night**. Don Warrington reads the bible story of the shepherds' visit to the Christ Child. **11.50** **Would I Lie to You? At Christmas**. With Richard Osman, Tom Courtenay, Sara Pascoe and Chris Kamara. (R) **12.20** Have I Got a Bit More 2016 News for You. **1.05** Clinton Khan. (R) **1.35** **Film**: While You Were Sleeping. (1995) **3.10** Weather for the Week Ahead. **3.15** BBC News.

BBC2

6.40 Countryfile. (R) **7.35** **Film**: The Cat in the Hat. (2003) **8.50** **Film**: Tom Thumb. (1958) **10.20** **Film**: Bee Movie. (2007) **11.40** Carols from King's. (R) **12.55** Wild Tales From the Village. (R) **1.55** The Good Life. (R) **2.25** **Film**: The Artist. (2011) Oscar-winning silent drama, starring Jean Dujardin. **4.00** Dancing the Nutcracker – Inside the Royal Ballet. **5.30** Sign Zone: The Queen's Christmas Broadcast. (R) **5.40** The Moroccan and Wise Christmas Show – 1976. (R) **6.45** **Christmas University Challenge**. Alumni of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and St Hilda's, Oxford compete in the penultimate first-round match of the special run of Christmas episodes. Jeremy Paxman hosts. **7.15** **Blackadder's Christmas Carol**. Kindly Victorian pushover Ebenezer Blackadder is visited by the Spirit of Christmas and gains an insight into the dastardly deeds of his ancestors. Starring Rowan Atkinson. (R) **8.00** **Dad's Army**. Pompous Captain Mainwaring proves he is a softie at heart by organising a Christmas treat for the struggling senior citizens of Walmington-on-Sea. (R) **8.30** **Gospel Christmas**. Gregory Porter and Beverley Knight host a concert from St John at Hackney, London, featuring the London Community Gospel Choir, the House Gospel Choir performing in front of a live audience, with guest vocalists including Katy B, Shaun Escoffery and vocal quintet Vadé. **9.30** **Victorian Bakers at Christmas**. The bakers prepare Victorian Christmas recipes, including twelfth cakes, bread-based punch, roasts to feed entire communities, and mince pies made with either beef or turkey. **10.30** **QI XL**. Sandi Toksvig and Alan Davies are joined by Josh Widdicombe, Susan Calman and Matt Lucas for an extended festive special, with a series of tough questions on the subject of Noel. **11.15** **Film**: **Great Expectations**. (2012) An orphan is given the chance to rise through high society with the assistance of a mysterious benefactor. Period drama, with Jeremy Irvine and Helena Bonham Carter. **1.15** **Film**: A Hard Day's Night. (1964) **2.40** **Film**: BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **6.55** Sooty. (R) **7.10** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.20** Almost Naked Animals. (R) **7.30** Almost Naked Animals. (R) **7.45** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.00** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.15** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.25** Weekend at Christmas. **9.25** Countrywise: Guide to Britain. (R) **9.55** **Film**: Despicable Me 2. (2013) **11.55** **Film**: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. (2002) **3.00** The Queen. **3.10** **Film**: The Lion King. (1994) Disney animated musical, with the voice of Matthew Broderick. **4.55** ITV News: Weather. **5.15** You've Been Framed! Harry's Naughty List. **5.45** Emmerdale. **6.45** **Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs at Christmas**. The comedian visits Battersea Dogs & Cats Home at Christmas, and tries to get a snuggle-toothed shih tzu the royal seal of approval when the Duchess of Cornwall drops by to open a new building. Paul also arranges an ultrasound for a heavily pregnant pug cross and nurses a dog with painfully bowed legs. **7.45** **ITV News**: Weather. **8.00** **Coronation Street**. Leanne is thrilled when Toyah returns to the cobbles, while Peter and Nick wind up brawling in the street, and Bethany collapses in the ginnet from an overdose. **9.00** **Maigret's Dead Man**. Rowan Atkinson stars as the Parisian detective in the second in a run of adaptations of Georges Simenon's books. Maigret is distracted from a string of attacks on three wealthy farms by a series of anonymous phone calls from a man who claims a gang is trying to kill him. He and his trusty associates LaPointe and Janvier go in search of the caller, which leads them to the discovery of a body that has been dumped out of a car. Maigret is convinced the corpse is the man who phoned him – but his face has been mutilated, making it impossible to confirm his identity. **11.00** **Film**: **Love Actually**. (2003) Interlinked tales of several people in search of love. Richard Gurr's romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Martine McCutcheon, Emma Thompson and Colin Firth. **1.30** **Film**: King Kong. (2005) **4.25** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.20 Prep & Landing: Naughty v Nice. (R) **6.40** The Bear. (R) **7.10** Painting the Bear Hunt. **7.15** **Film**: Animals United. (2010) **8.55** The Simpsons. (R) **9.20** The Simpsons. (R) **9.50** The Simpsons. (R) **10.20** The Simpsons. (R) **10.50** Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas. (R) **11.15** Painting the Bear Hunt. **11.20** Father Christmas. (R) **11.50** The Snowman. (R) **12.20** **Film**: The Wizard in the Stone. (1963) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Rickie Sorenson. **2.05** The Alternative Christmas Message. **2.15** Channel 4 News. **2.40** **Film**: It's a Wonderful Life. (1946) Fantasy drama, starring James Stewart. **4.55** The Snowman and the Snowdog. (R) **5.25** We're Going on a Bear Hunt. (R) **6.00** **Film**: **Home Alone**. (1990) A boy has to fend for himself when he is accidentally left behind after his family jets off to Paris for Christmas. The youngster initially enjoys his freedom, but is soon forced to resort to ingenious booby traps to defend the family home from two dim-witted burglars. Comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, John Heard, Catherine O'Hara and John Candy. **8.00** **Travel Man: 48 Hours in Florence**. Rebel Wilson joins Richard Ayode on a rapid-fire tour of the Italian city, taking in as much as they can in just two days. They race past iconic works of art including Botticelli's Venus and Michelangelo's David, take in some street art, go on a rafting trip down the River Arno, climb to the top of the city's cathedral and dine on a traditional tripe sandwich. **9.00** **Gogglebox 2016**. A look back at some of the highlights of this year's series, featuring regular armchair presenters Leon and June, Christopher and Stephen, and the Michaels family offering their thoughts on popular and topical TV shows. **10.30** **Alan Carr's Christmas Chatty Man**. The host is joined for this Christmas special by guests including Tom Daley, Gary Barlow, Danni Minogue and Martin Kemp, with music from Emeli Sandé and Robbie Williams. **12.35** **Film**: Four Christmases. (2008) **2.05** Rude Tube Christmas Cracker. (2016) **3.05** Very British Problems at Christmas. (R) **4.00** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.00** Shopperspots. (R) **5.25** The Restoration Man. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.10 Milkshake!: Milkshake! Festive Fun. **6.15** Shimmer and Shine. **6.40** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.00** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **7.20** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **7.35** **Film**: An American in Paris. (1951) Romantic musical, starring Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron. **9.50** **Film**: On the Town. (1949) Musical, starring Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin. **11.50** **Film**: Scrooge. (1970) Musical fantasy, starring Albert Finney. **2.10** **Film**: The Wizard of Oz. (1939) Musical fantasy, starring Judy Garland. **4.10** **Film**: Singin' in the Rain. (1952) Musical comedy, starring Gene Kelly. **6.15** **Britain's Favourite Xmas Songs**. A countdown of popular songs that are guaranteed to make any Christmas party go with a swing. Highlights include the Jackson 5's Santa Claus Is Coming to Town, Greg Lake's I Believe in Father Christmas, the Waitresses Christmas Wrapping and the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl's Fairytale of New York. Is Mud's Lonely This Christmas past its sell-by date? Will Jona Lewie ever Stop the Cavalry? And where would any Christmas party be without Slade and their classic anthem Merry Xmas Everybody? But which one will top the nation's festive chart? Featuring contributions by artists, producers, video directors, composers and journalists, who shed light on the creation of the songs and their accompanying videos. (R) **8.30** **When Celebrities Go Pop**. A countdown of the 40 most memorable musical efforts by celebrities who have decided to diversify into music. The programme features performances by Mr T, Katie Price, Vinnie Jones, Sam Fox, Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards, David Hasselhoff, an assortment of soap stars and Christopher Lee, who embarked on a second career as a heavy-metal singer in his 80s. **10.30** **Film**: **Dallas Buyers Club**. (2013) Premiere. A man diagnosed with HIV sets up an organisation to smuggle drugs for treating the condition into the US. Fact-based drama, starring Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto. **12.45** Greatest Ever Christmas Songs. (R) **1.10** SuperCasino. Live interactive gaming. **3.10** Chris Tarrant: On the Xmas Express. (R) **4.00** Now That's Funny! (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.40** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 King Lear **10.10** The Good Old Days: Christmas 1976 **11.00** Top of the Pops Christmas Hits **12.00** Old Grey Whistle Test: 70's Gold **1.30** All Aboard! The Sleigh Ride **3.30** Close
ITV2
11.00 You've Been Framed! With Bells On **11.35** Emmerdale **12.00** Coronation Street **1.05** **Film**: The Polar Express (2004) **3.10** You've Been Framed! **4.15** Catchphrase Christmas Special **5.15** Minion Madness **5.30** **Film**: One Hundred and One Dalmatians (1961) **7.15** **Film**: Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **9.00** **Film**: Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason (2004) **11.15** Family Guy **1.10** American Dad! **2.05** The Cleveland Show **2.30** **Film**: Not Another Teen Movie (2001) **4.10** The Almost Impossible Gameshow **5.00** Planet's Funniest Animals **5.45** ITV2 Nightscreen
ITV3
11.30 **Film**: Carry On Cleo (1964) **1.25** **Film**: Carry On Girls (1973) **3.15** **Film**: Carry On Camping (1969) **5.05** **Film**: Carry On Up the Jungle (1970) **7.00** **Film**: Carry On Cowboy (1966) **9.00** **Film**: Stepfoes and Son Ride Again (1973) **11.00** **Film**: The Sting (1973) **1.40** **Film**: The Four Musketeers (1974) **3.35** Wycliffe **5.00** Doctor at Large **5.25** Movies Now **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen
ITV4
11.30 **Film**: The Green Berets (1968) **2.20** **Film**: Dunkirk (1958) **5.05** **Film**: Where Eagles Dare (1968) **8.10** **Film**: Jaws: The Revenge (1987) **10.00** **Film**: Body of Lies (2008) **12.35** **Film**: The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011) **3.30** Hell on Wheels **4.15** The Wine Show **5.10** Goodwood Classic Cars
E4
11.25 Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **11.30** Baby Daddy **12.30** How I Met Your Mother **2.30** The Goldbears **3.00** The Big Bang Theory: Festive Guesst 6.00 Frozen at Christmas **7.00** The Snowman **7.35** The Snowman and the Snowdog **8.00** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** **Film**: The Inbetweeners **2.20** **Film**: The Inbetweeners **1.20** Tattoo Fixers at Christmas **2.25** Virtually Famous Christmas Special **3.10** The Inbetweeners **3.35** Hollyoaks
Film4
11.00 Rio (2011) **12.50** Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs (2009) **2.35** Cheaper By the Dozen (2003) **4.25** The Princess Diaries (2001) **6.35** The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011) **9.00** Thor (2011) **11.15** Your Highness (2011) **1.20** Vertigo (1958) **4.00** Close

eating out



Hot dog with a difference – Mac and Cheese Dog



Burger Priest in busy spot in Wolverhampton city centre



Are you sitting comfortably – variety of seating choices



High Priest Burger – one of the many choices

Praise be! It's a Priestly burger

IN the beginning, there was the burger, and the burger was. . . well, not very good.

It's fair to say that it has taken the UK some time to master the hamburger. Once the only options you were McDonalds, Wimpy, and the kind of hot food vans you get at Wolves matches.

Not exactly an embarrassment of riches. Eventually Burger King came along and upped the burger game somewhat.

Then The Gourmet Burger Kitchen arrived and changed all that, reasoning that if you were going to be a burger chain, then people might be willing to pay a bit more money and come back for more if the burgers were, you know, actually half-decent.

And so burgers got posh. Rather than the embarrassingly perfunctory slabs of meat and processed cheese on offer at high street fast food establishments, you now get things like dry-aged steak, smoked Applewood cheese, onion jam, truffle mayonnaise and avocado.

The success of Gourmet Burger Kitchen proved that there was a market for Fancy

Pete Cashmore tucks in

Dan poshburgers, and indeed the subsequent rise of Five Guys, of which there are two in Birmingham, proved that you could apply the posh burger ethos to a fast food environment and make it work.

Any city worth its salt has at least one posh burger joint in its midst, and it was with this in mind that, a few months back, Wolverhampton welcomed Burger Priest.

How could it possibly fail? It's in a prime location opposite House Of Fraser, with a whole load of footfall due to the fact that the Man On The Oss is around the corner.

Which is why it's puzzling that when myself and my dinner date arrived at 8pm on a Saturday, the place was all but deserted, with more serving staff than customers.

It may well be that we were in some kind of post-dinner, pre-chucking out time lull, or that word of mouth hasn't started working for Burger Priest yet. What this at least meant was that we got to take up one of the sofas in the funky interior – there are sofas, regular tables and high-stool diner-style

counters to choose from. As we entered, Rosanna by Toto was playing on the music system which I took as a good sign. Largely, I was proved correct.

It's a fascinating proposition, is Burger Priest, with a menu full of the weird and the eccentric and the occasionally down-right loopy. If you wanted, for example, you could feast on something called the Surf'n'Turf Burger, six ounces of meat patties on a bun, with lobster tail meat and seafood sauce.

Trimmings

Another option might be the Mac and Cheese Dog, which as the name suggests is a Frankfurter sausage on a bun, topped with crispy bacon and macaroni and cheese. I think it's fair to say that one has enough stodge for anyone.

My comrade and I decided to play it safe and go for the Altar Burger – one each, which is simply a double-patty burger with bacon, smoked Applewood cheese and all the salad trimmings. You have the option of piling on some extras at no extra cost if you feel the need, which I obviously did, and

so I decided to throw in a layer of sautéed mushrooms too – sautéed onions, bell peppers and beef tomato are among some of the other choices.

Now, initially I had intended to just get a burger and fries, but at the last minute I had a rush of blood to the head and decided that my side should be salted beef poutine, consisting of French fries in meat gravy with cheese curd.

Well it seems like Burger Priest subscribe to the American model of meat patty – basically, shape a big lump of beef until it is roughly round and then slap it on the grill with the minimum of frills and let it go. The smoked cheese is, I would argue, the perfect cheese to accompany a burger, and the bacon was thick and rustic.

Burger Priest definitely isn't for everyone – it's loud, it's funky, it's a bit brash and you have to be prepared to literally get your hands dirty. My suggestion to the team would be to provide their customers with multiple wet wipes and then they'd be nudging true greatness. Even so, they claim to treat their meaty products with a touch of the divine, and in me, they have a new convert.

FILM CHOICES

BOXING DAY
Captain Phillips, ITV, 9pm
An American cargo ship sets a dangerous course around the coast of Somalia, while inland, four men are pressed into service as pirates by the local warlords. The captain is taken hostage when the raiding party hijacks the vessel, resulting in a tense five-day crisis. Fact-based thriller, starring Tom Hanks and Barkhad Abdi. (2013)

TUESDAY
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, ITV, 730pm
The teenage wizard is chosen to represent Hogwarts School in a dangerous magical tournament. Fourth instalment of the fantasy saga, starring Daniel Radcliffe and Robert Pattinson. (2005)



Captain Phillips, Boxing Day, ITV, 9pm

WEDNESDAY
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, ITV, 730pm
The young wizard struggles to convince his fellow sorcerers that the evil Lord Voldemort has returned to life. When Hogwarts headmaster Dumbledore is ousted in favour of a sadistic replacement, Harry realises he must take matters into his own hands, uniting his fellow pupils to form a secret army and training them for the inevitable confrontation to come. Adventure sequel, starring Daniel Radcliffe. (2007)

THURSDAY
Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, BBC1, 11.20pm
The globe-trotting archaeologist races against Soviet agents to find a mysterious artefact of untold power. Action adventure sequel, starring Harrison Ford and Cate Blanchett. (2008)

FRIDAY
Captain America: The Winter Soldier, BBC1, 8.30pm
The superhuman soldier becomes an operative for secret intelligence agency SHIELD, but grows suspicious of their motives. Following a battle with a mysterious cyborg assassin, he and fellow Avenger Black Widow become fugitives, and try to bring down a sinister conspiracy. Comic-book thriller sequel, starring Chris Evans. (2014)

Money matters in this mystery tale of murder

TV may have brought us the definitive version of Hercule Poirot, but the BBC feels like the small screen home of Agatha Christie.

It has adapted the Miss Marple cases, and broadcast adventures based on the Tommy and Tuppence characters last year, as well as a blockbusting version of And Then There Were None.

The latter was shown during the festive season, and this year, there's another all-star Christie feast for fans – this take of her classic short story, The Witness for the Prosecution.

"And Then There Were None made a huge impact last year, garnering great reviews and audiences of over eight million," remarks executive producer Karen Thrusell. "We're thrilled to be reunited with Sarah Phelps as she takes on another iconic title, an incendiary courtroom drama that will keep you guessing right to the very end. The source material is so strong, and we hope the end result will be every bit as striking as And Then There Were None."

The Witness for the Prosecution is

no stranger to screen treatment, of course. The BBC made the first version way back in 1949; a US version made it to TV in 1953, the same year it was first produced as a stage play.

Perhaps the most famous adaptation came in 1957 when it was turned into a movie by none other than the legendary Billy Wilder, who cast Charles Laughton, Marlene Dietrich and Tyrone Power (in his final completed part) in the lead roles.

Then, in 1982, another TV drama followed, this time featuring an all-star cast that included Ralph Richardson, Deborah Kerr, Donald Pleasence and Wendy Hiller. It was recently announced that Ben Affleck will direct and star in a future take on the tale.

Filming for the latest production based on the story took place in Liverpool this summer and sees Toby Jones, Andrea Riseborough, Kim Cattrall and David Haig taking lead roles.

"With the long terrible shadow of the Great War falling across the rackety, feral 1920s, The Witness For The Prosecution is a compelling story of

deceit, desire, murder, money and morality, innocence and guilt, heartbreak and – most painful and dangerous of all – love," says Phelps. "At the centre of this dark and tangled net is the astonishing character of Romaine, a noir heroine for all our times."

Romaine is an enigmatic chorus girl and the partner of Leonard Vole, a young chancer who has been accused of the brutal murder of the enormously wealthy Emily French. She's been found in her handsome 1920s London residence and, having left her fortune to Vole, he certainly had a motive to kill her.

Vole is convinced that Romaine can prove his innocence, but he is in for a terrible surprise...

"Combining Sarah's brilliance with the excellent and skilful eye of our director, Julian Jarrold, we expect to deliver a show that will thrill both audiences who have enjoyed Christie's work before and those who are coming to it for the first time," claims Hilary Strong, CEO of Agatha Christie Ltd.

Let's hope her verdict is the right one!



The Witness for the Prosecution, Boxing Day, BBC1, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

BOXING DAY
Still Open All Hours
BBC1, 8.30pm
Granville and Gastric find themselves playing marriage counsellors, while Leroy adopts a festive disguise to avoid relationship trouble of a different kind. Meanwhile, Mrs Featherstone struggles to get into the Christmas spirit and Kath attempts to bring the street together as one harmonious choir of carollers to beat Finkle Street once and for all - but does Granville have a trick up his sleeve to help them out? David Jason, Tim Healy, James Baxter and Stephanie Cole star.

TUESDAY
There's a Croc in My Kitchen
Channel 5, 8pm
Documentary following people around Britain who keep predatory wild animals as unusual pets. Chris Weller from Kent owns a crocodile, and spent £20,000 converting his house to accommodate the dangerous reptile, while in Gloucester, Patricia and her sons live with a serval, a big cat that is one of Africa's deadliest hunters. Jim and Chris own a 20-stone Komodo dragon, while Terry fears his pet lynx Pudding may have been poisoned. Devon resident Andre owns a wolf hybrid that shares her bed – but fears he may be on his last legs.

WEDNESDAY
Jonathan Creek
BBC1, 9pm
It's not quite a Christmas ghost story, but there's definitely a spooky element to Jonathan's latest case, which centers on Daemons' Roost, the home of a 19th-century sorcerer who claimed to be able to summon the powers of Hell. The property now belongs to horror film director Nathan Clore (played by Ken Bones, which is arguably an even better name for a gore maestro) who summons his stepdaughter Alison (Georgie Lord) home so he can explain exactly what happened to her family there when she was a child. Unfortunately, Clore suffers a debilitating stroke before he can come clean, leaving Alison to try to piece together the mystery together herself. Jonathan may be just the man to help her, but his wife Polly (Sarah Alexander) believes he's already got enough on his plate. Meanwhile, the Reverend Wendell Wilkie (Warwick Davis) also finds himself drawn into the mystery.

THURSDAY
Life in the Snow
BBC1, 8pm
Gordon Buchanan goes in search of



Jonathan Creek, Wednesday, BBC1, 9pm

animals that live in snowy conditions and have adapted to survive in cold weather. The programme features polar bears raising their cubs, owls keeping their supplies of food hidden under a layer of snow, penguins that huddle together for warmth, and wolverines and ravens working alongside each other to find food. He also takes a look at the lives of animals associated with Christmas, including robins and reindeer, revealing the truth behind the story of Rudolph's red nose.

FRIDAY
Noel's Sell or Swap Live
Channel 4, 7pm
Children of the 1970s and 1980s might remember Noel Edmonds' Saturday morning TV show Multi Coloured Swap Shop which, in the days before the internet, gave kids a

chance to offload their junk by exchanging it for someone else's. So, prepare to feel nostalgic as Noel hosts this familiar-sounding programme, in which guests get a chance to bid on an eclectic mix of items. The owners will also be there to explain why they are getting rid of their stuff – it might be an unwanted present, something bought in haste, or the cause of a series of family rows. Or perhaps they just thought it would be more fun to be on the TV then to sell it online. Either way, Noel and his SoS team are here to help.

Judi Dench: All the World's Her Stage
BBC2, 8pm
She's one of Britain's greatest actors and has also been dubbed 'the second most popular woman in Britain' (presumably the Queen pipped her to the top spot). Now this documentary, narrated by Colin Salmon, looks back over her remarkable 60-year career, and finds out just why she has become such an institution. The actors sharing their memories of working with her include Daniel Craig, Sir Ian McKellen and Billy Connolly, who reminisces about the time he thought Judi was falling for him on the set of Mrs Brown. Former Miss Money Penny Samantha Bond reveals that she had to calm Pierce Brosnan's nerves before his first scene with the legendary actress.

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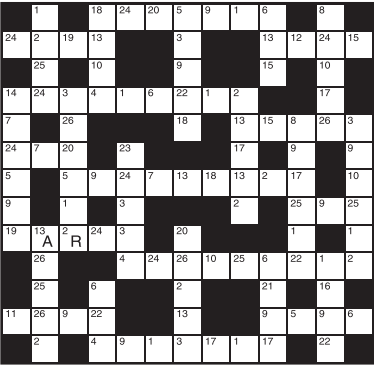


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BRAIN GYM No.409

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:
D H G B Q K P N L Y Z A W
J S O E I V U F C X T M R

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

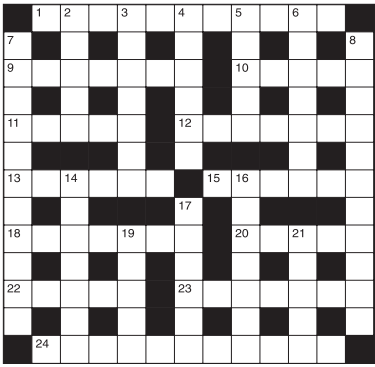
Cryptic Clues:

Across

- 1. Service chiefs? (4,7)
- 9. They may be black or white pelts (7)
- 10. Get to a stretch of the river (5)
- 11. The car that creates records (5)
- 12. His choice will get cross (7)
- 13. Father's attempt to be a kind of cook (6)
- 15. Scarcity of thread, perhaps (6)
- 18. Train that is brought to absolute rest (7)
- 20. Excel in striking a note (5)
- 22. It comes back to beat a giant (5)
- 23. At least a soldier will be (7)
- 24. A case of mixed dates (11)

Down

- 2. Turn out a bad scholar? (5)
- 3. She puts on other people's clothes (7)
- 4. Result of a questionable action? (6)
- 5. All-male crew of a novel boat (5)
- 6. Person goes round a nuclear establishment (7)
- 7. Fit to take possession (11)
- 8. Time may be on its side (6,5)
- 14. Don't allow bitterness to remain (7)
- 16. Perhaps ore is turned up on wearing away of the soil (7)
- 17. Soldier with papers in order (6)
- 19. The keynote of medicine (5)
- 21. Is in too much hurry to use the letter-opener? (5)



Quick Clues:

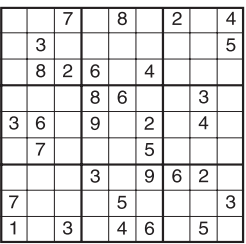
Across

- 1. Being tested (2,9)
- 9. Stupid (7)
- 10. Engine (5)
- 11. Bit (5)
- 12. Feeling (7)
- 13. Spent (6)
- 15. Mourn (6)
- 18. Harbour (7)
- 20. Unsullied (5)
- 22. Proportion (5)
- 23. Ingenuous (7)
- 24. Disbelief (11)

Down

- 2. Sound (5)
- 3. Withdraw (7)
- 4. Squabble (6)
- 5. Time (5)
- 6. Exterior (7)
- 7. Indignation (11)
- 8. Insobriety (11)
- 14. Raze (7)
- 16. Narration (7)
- 17. Filament (6)
- 19. Smell (5)
- 21. Upright (5)

Sudoku



Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

2	9	5	6	1	7	4	8	3
6	4	3	2	5	9	6	1	7
1	7	6	3	4	8	2	9	5
6	8	4	1	9	5	3	7	2
5	2	1	4	7	3	9	6	8
7	3	9	8	6	2	1	5	4
4	5	7	9	3	1	8	2	6
3	1	8	5	2	6	7	4	9
9	6	2	7	8	4	5	3	1

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Crossbar; 5 Spot; 9 Anti; 10 Overcome; 11 Downy; 12 Raiders; 13 Grappling iron; 18 Narrates; 19 Fit; 20 Realize; 21 Sarah; 22 Last; 23 Slipends. Down: 2 Rancour; 3 Stirrup; 4 Advertisement; 6 Pioneer; 7 Treason; 8 Trying; 13 General; 14 Airways; 15 Placid; 16 Inflate; 17 Off-hand. QUICK - Across: 1 Communal; 5 Wash; 9 Keen; 10 Relevant; 11 Calms; 12 Edifice; 13 Glamorousness; 18 Vertical; 19 Mine; 20 Revenue; 21 Anger; 22 Silt; 23 Recalled. Down: 2 Overall; 3 Minimum; 4 An eye for an eye; 6 Avarice; 7 Holiness; 8 Remiss; 13 Govers; 14 Arrival; 15 Orient; 16 Nominal; 17 Sincere.

Thinking space

Quiz

- 1. Which religion's holy book is the Guru Granth Sahib?
- 2. Which sporting entertainers were founded in 1927 by Abraham Saperstein?
- 3. What, in the SI system, replaced the erg?
- 4. Which singer's autobiography is called Take Me Home?
- 5. What was Queen Victoria's residence on the Isle of Wight?
- 6. Which king of England was James VII of Scotland?
- 7. Who provides the voice for wicked Uncle Scar in The Lion King?
- 8. Whose band were the Crickets?
- 9. Which US state is nicknamed the Garden State?
- 10. Who originally conducted the Three Tenors?

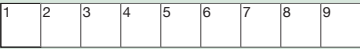
Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Eight; 2 Elgar; 3 Jack Straw; 4 St. Bernadette; 5 A monkey; 6 Guy Gibson; 7 Anna Pasternak; 8 Carpathians; 9 Barbarossa; 10 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
Niner: GERANIUMS

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

9628745 gives a hard rock,
13784 gives a hard stone,
9674 gives small stones.



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Dudley Chronicle Thursday, December 22, 2016

HOROSCOPES 2017



Aries

(March 21 to April 20)

Never backward in coming forward, this year gives you the ideal opportunity to display your talents and charm. Consider it a showreel for your life as you want it to be. Those dreams of success? Clearly you are determined to see them become reality!

January brings freedom and the urge to kick out and experience life.

Watch those spending sprees though, as the 'feel-good factor' could see you splashing the cash. Passionate temptations are all around and serious self-control will be called for.

Trying not to fall in love with love will be hard, especially through summer and autumn.

If you seek someone who is adventurous and spontaneous, then make a beeline for a Sagittarius or Leo.

Looking for someone to complement your softer side? Someone who will fan your fire? Then Libra and Gemini are for you.

This could be the time that you start a business or develop your current career.

Partner yourself with someone who will sort out the day-to-day nitty-gritty while you keep sales soaring.

OVERALL: A year in which you decide to be yourself and a great deal less flexible.

You also decide to aim high in anything you do.

Shooting for the stars?

Why not!



Taurus

(April 21 to May 21)

Making the most of opportunities at work, growing a business or developing your career?

In this new year, these run a close second to that wonderfully sensuous love life of yours!

Determination is your middle name and you attract love and money like a magnet. So, what is not to like?

One word of caution. Health. Burning the candle at both ends could see you singed.

Make the most of that all-important time to rest and recharge your batteries.

Pace yourself.

You will always find time, of course, to enjoy the finer things in life: music, art and any sensual pleasures that take your imaginative fancy.

That you have to work hard for these does not phase you.

Summer is a pleasurable time and bonds with new people, lovers and family abound.

It is now that you fully appreciate how important family and friends are to you.

You are a desirable companion and lover!

You will find fun with Virgo and Scorpio and fan the flames of passion with Libra and Gemini.

Enjoy.

OVERALL: A year in which you manage to fruitfully combine work with pleasure, being both responsible and rather exciting at the same time.

How many signs can lay claim to that?



Gemini

(May 22 to June 21)

An exciting mind and an excitable body make you one of the most lovable signs. Who would not want to be in your social circle?

Always in demand, now you could be spoilt for choice. This also applies to your working life, where chances to shine start early. Showcasing yourself in the arts or travel will light up your buttons!

A year when you feel at home and in your element.

For some, a hobby can give this outlet, but for others it can become an obsession. Find your best mate in either Libra or Sagittarius, but don't let anyone keep you earth-bound!

You can hear the buzz from an open mind miles away and will be attracted. Make the most of these fleeting but important opportunities to find someone special.

Those who already have a partner will want to be more adventurous. Gathering information sounds boring, which you find intolerable.

However, with your special way of making words come alive and pictures shine out, you find a special niche.

Spring and autumn alike find you seeking out unusual and thrilling new friends.

Circulate!

OVERALL: Remember that the more social effort you make, the greater will be your success.

The chance to build on all of your relationships brings a winter of great satisfaction and deepest pleasure.



Cancer

(June 22-July 23)

Known for valuing your home and privacy, this year will be no exception. Protection is your game and that applies to others as well as yourself.

A surge of love and companionship through the spring encourages you to come out of your shell. It is a time to reach out to form partnerships, be they professional or personal.

Sometimes the two meet and, as the year progresses, so does your attraction for someone special and perhaps older.

Late spring and summer is a good time to seal deals and move home or career. This is where your instinct and intuition kicks in.

The chance of a deeper love and understanding comes partly because of efforts that were made in the past. However, when it comes to matters of the heart, there is a need to be more open and accepting.

It can be hard to let someone into your life if you fear being hurt.

Please don't let that stop you from having the kind of love you have always desired.

Passion with Pisces or Leo can be fun and challenging, but look for the Libran influence for truer understanding.

OVERALL: A year when you are asked to accept what you do not fully understand in personal relationships. You think more deeply, love more deeply and go more with the ebb and flow of nature.

Sound good? It is.



Leo

(July 24 to August 23)

It may seem strange to start by concentrating on those around you, Leo.

This is, however, a year in which your greatest happiness and satisfaction will come from doing just that.

There is all the usual love and attention that you crave, but please pass some of it on. Much time is taken up with youngsters who show their willingness to learn.

Love is on your tail right through to the autumn and perhaps beyond. In a partnership already?

Then be ready to repel those boarders!

Early in the spring, a hiccup either at home or work could leave you puzzled and discontented.

Consider, rather than produce a knee-jerk reaction.

Cash cannot be king when you don't have enough of it.

At times you may feel like the poor relative, but you rise above this and maybe adjust your gift-giving or paying for too many rounds (one of your nicer traits!)

As the summer settles, helping and teaching others brings such satisfaction that a career or move in this direction is something to be considered.

OVERALL: A year that is a wee bit revolutionary by your own standards.

Sometimes, though, this can lead us to fresher fields and new horizons. Your delight in children continues.



Virgo

(August 24 to September 23)

The restlessness that typifies your sign is the strong point of movement. Constantly considering, plotting, changing and criticising those around you can appear negative. Not a bit of it!

With encouragement, you can work out any problem and solve any emotional issue. This year, challenges centre on love and wealth.

The possibility of a boost to the coffers is strong, maybe from a long distance or brought by someone so far unknown.

Any new love affairs could be fun, passionate, but short-lived. Libra and Scorpio figure heavily.

Don't go overboard and invest too much emotionally until you know someone is firmly in your mind and heart. Realise that all nature changes and your own thinking along with it.

Something that was important 10 years ago may now have passed into history.

There are possibilities for you grow through this year. Spoilt for choice? At times, yes.

Don't rush yourself and when you make a decision, make it wisely.

From a stable base, you are able to experiment and be flexible.

OVERALL: A year when you are happier with yourself than you are with others. That is a good sign for you, being good as you are at sorting priorities. There is no doubt of the direction both your work and love lives are going.



Libra

(September 24 to October 23)

In a year of personal growth, the emphasis is on building on your strength and happiness.

Allow yourself to be indulged and edified, worshipped and adored. Everything in your life can be made fairer, more harmonious and beautiful.

It needs imagination rather than cash, which is just as well.

Ambitious signs such as Taurus and Capricorn attract because of their dynamic attitude.

As the year progresses, the emphasis becomes more on stabilising your position, be it in a partnership or on the financial side.

Tidy up any credit cards, loans or loose ends.

There may be cash in the coffers, but avoid spending it unless really necessary.

The word 'no', which is not often in your vocabulary, becomes uttered more as you decide not to accept second best.

Your nature means you will always help the weak, Libra.

However, you have decided that you will no longer allow yourself to be taken for granted.

OVERALL: It will be a year when flirting and loving see you very much in your element.

You continue to make your home a sanctuary from that unbalanced outside world. Those who are looking for love will have fun searching and meet some fine folk.



Scorpio

(October 24 to November 22)

Starting this year from a strong position, you see the future as a lump of clay waiting to be moulded. Others would spend months messing around and deciding what they want. You won't! How great it is to know your true path.

Affection is rife and mostly a two-way street. Some may flash by in their Lamborghini, others potter in their vintage delights. All, though, will be looking in your direction.

Build up your health and energy for a fast run from October.

If the cash is being splashed, try to make sure it isn't yours. Indulgence is your middle name and this is most likely to be shared by a Taurus or Pisces.

Passions are met and form an imaginative journey of sensuality. This is nature at its best, whether you find it in Paris, Birmingham or your garden!

The sights and sounds of the world inspire you so, be you a songwriter, poet or welder, you see creativity in everything.

Bonds are strengthened through play and travel.

OVERALL: A year that is creative and loving. Sharing your interests and those of a loved one brings knowledge and inspiration.

Take the time to smell the roses, but ignore the thorns. Pamper your senses with colour and textures in the home.



Sagittarius

(November 23 to December 21)

Moons around Jupiter showcase its beauty, and similarly your friends and family circle you in a web of love throughout this year. As you receive it, share the love around.

You like to have the best, the biggest and the most amazing. However, you also appreciate the rare and unique. New loves can be found, but your criteria are high.

Spellbinding Aquarius or loving Libra can moon over you all they like.

Look for friends where there is a good conversation to be had and where you can share in their humour and experiences.

As the autumn approaches there is a need for more exciting activities. Creativity goes hand in hand with travel and a possible link with working for a charity or raising funds through sport. Certainly you will need to burn off some of that high-octane energy! You work for yourself and your own goals, and if that benefits loved ones, what could be better? One thing you realise is you cannot help others unless you help your own needs first.

OVERALL: A year where excess can prevail, and not always to your advantage.

Being practical is not the first thing on your mind when the adrenaline is running high. Even so, a bit of forward planning and care will avoid misfortunes.



Capricorn

(December 22 to January 20)

Winning friends and influencing people? Nothing new there then! This year is a continuation of your previous success, but with a strong element of romance and even passion.

Will you be mixing business with pleasure? Probably not as you take your work seriously. However, that won't rule out the possibility of you working very closely with a loved one. Love is sometimes a puzzle to you. Can you be bothered to solve it? Could be worth your time...

Looking for a partner? Life rather than work?

The person with the right amount of sparkle and commitment could pop along at any time.

Be prepared to go to pastures new (maybe even abroad) and a delightful accent could charm your senses. Virgo and Sagittarius can set off a spark but will Leo make a match? A lovely face gets you interested, but can they cut it with the serious conversation?

Potential lovers should note that if they feed your mind, they will also fire your imagination.

OVERALL: A year when you take charge both at work and home. Great. One important point to be made though. You really must learn to relax more and let go of all those preconceived ideas.

The only barrier to happiness comes from within.



Aquarius

(January 21 to February 19)

Not immediately appearing to be a 'mover and shaker', it comes as a surprise to others when they see your direct and simple approach. This year you aim to stir up all sorts of preconceived ideas and attitudes.

Seek, in a partner, someone who will understand and be happy to listen to your theories of life, the universe and everything else besides.

A flighty number would soon get bored and fly the nest!

Work is something that can either easily bore you or totally take you over.

You prefer the latter at the moment. Passion at home is great, but you also need passion for a subject or plan. Quite clearly genius material, that's you!

Luck is on your side for most of this year, and especially in the autumn and winter.

Remember that, in politics, more than one opinion counts, as we are all aware.

Pushing yours too hard could see you on a sticky wicket or even getting the birdie!

OVERALL: A year when your passions show more than usual. Don't feel that you have any explaining to do.

Sometimes you need to be single-minded. It's the only way to get progress and benefit others.



Pisces

(February 20 to March 20)

Finding yourself and fulfilling your dreams is the mission for this new year.

Last year saw some emotional confusion.

You may still be looking for that elusive something or someone. No problem. So are many others and one of them may be looking for someone just like you!

Keep away from lethargy and fine-tune your curiosity.

Seek to know what, why and how about anything that catches your attention.

It is through this that your heart will begin to sing again.

Look hard, but not necessarily fast for someone who shares your hopes and attitudes. A negative friendship needs to be left behind.

No longer will you accept second best or being taken for granted. Being in a state of change is exciting.

Spend time with those who inspire and teach you how to get to where you want to be. This year you find companionship and maybe even love with sympathetic signs such as Libra or Cancer.

OVERALL: A year full of new possibilities.

All you need is the confidence to pursue them. Easier said than done? Of course, but the rewards are high and the risk to your ego small indeed. Dreams need working toward.

New Ignis offers funky, good to drive small car

By Jon Reay

It's been nearly 10 years since the last of the previous generation Ignis rolled out of Suzuki's UK showrooms, and what a difference a decade has made.

While the old car managed to whip up a decent number of loyal customers over the seven years it was on sale, it'd be fair to say that it was a dull-but-worthy creation – well priced and equipped, but hardly the first word in desirability.

Suzuki is hoping that this distinctive-looking new car can succeed where the old car didn't, and provide a properly desirable alternative to European rivals.

On looks alone, the Ignis is off to a cracking start already and manages to pull off the chunky-yet-cute vibe very well indeed. There's no doubt it's a small car, but thanks to a squat stance and puffed-out wheel arches, it looks far more miniature-crossover than jumped-up city car – particularly compared to its rivals.

The interior is similarly impressive. Materials are what you'd expect from a Japanese city car – which is to say general hard to the touch and a bit flimsy here and there – but all the crucial elements like door handles and electric window switches feel pretty solid.

More importantly, the design is spot on, with brightly-coloured details and a two-tone dashboard lifting the ambience inside the Ignis considerably.



Boot space isn't huge but it's adequate

The Ignis is a comparatively tiny car but practicality is still surprisingly good. All cars get five doors, and rear passengers will find a surprising amount of head and leg room – enough for two adults to sit comfortably, particularly on SZ-T and SZ5 cars with their sliding rear seats.

Boot space isn't huge by any means at 260 litres with seats in position, but that's only 10 litres behind the larger Ka+^s. Selecting the optional four-wheel-drive system will knock that back to 204, however, and it's worth bearing in mind that only the entry-level SZ3 trim can seat five.

Safety is relatively good too, with the Ignis boasting a five star EuroNCAP rating for models equipped with Dual Camera Brake Support. Models without the feature get a three star rating, however.

There's just the one engine option: a 1.2-litre four-cylinder petrol borrowed from the Swift. It's not as perky as the 1.0-litre turbocharged 'Boosterjet' unit you'll find in the Baleno, but it's more than enough to propel the sub-one tonne Ignis along with ease. As in the Swift, it needs some revving to really get going, but if anything that adds to the Ignis's honest appeal.

Some cars get an SHVS 'mild' hybrid system too – effectively a way of regenerating the power used when you brake. Fitting this not only improves the Ignis's fuel economy a smidge, but knocks a few fractions of a second off the 0-60mph figure too.

You sit deliberately high in the Ignis, so visibility from the front and sides is excellent and jumping in and out is an ease. The steering wheel adjusts for rake but not reach, though it's still easy to get comfortable. Buttons and switches are logically laid out in front of you too, and although the touch screen navigation system isn't the most responsive around, it's easy enough to use.

The Ignis has been set up for comfort rather than sportiness – and that seems about right for a car of this type. Ride quality is good even on the larger 16-inch alloys, and things are remarkably stable on motorways.

Take things off the beaten path and things are similarly impressive. The Ignis's optional four-wheel-drive system isn't a particularly sophisticated one, but should be more than enough to get it across a muddy field with ease.

It's hard to fault the Ignis on value for money – even entry-level SZ3 cars get plenty of toys. Air conditioning, front electric windows and a DAB radio with USB and Bluetooth connectivity are all thrown in.

When you consider that barely any other cars at this price can be fitted with four-wheel-drive too, the Ignis makes all the more sense – despite the fact that it's only available as an option on the top-spec SZ5 trim level.

Priced from £11,000.



On looks alone, the Ignis is off to a cracking start

There are car sales events, and there is the T.Wall Vauxhall Massive Christmas & New Year SALE NOW ON! The West Midlands' BIGGEST New & Used Vauxhall Sale Event

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Most extreme school run for Kodiao

British parents spend almost nine weeks of their lives ferrying kids to and from the school gates, according to new research from Škoda. And for many – over a third (36 per cent) of UK mums and dads – the ‘school run’ is the most stressful parental duty that they undertake.

However, whilst traffic (64 per cent) is the most common obstacle facing people on their daily commute, spare a thought for those living in the most remote parts of the UK. According to Škoda’s study, in the furthest flung places such as the Scottish Highlands and Welsh Valleys, delays to school runs caused by hazards such as flooding rise by as much as 18 per cent against the national average (56 per cent vs 38 per cent).

Livestock on the roads also causes issues. In the county of Sutherland in the far north of Scotland, and in the mid Wales county of Ceredigion, an average of one in ten parents regularly has to stop to bypass rogue sheep and cattle – almost twice as often as any other rural location.

On the back of these figures, Škoda sought out the country’s ‘most extreme school run’ – a nationwide search for the family facing the toughest terrain and obstacles – to put its brand new large SUV, the Kodiao, through its paces in the UK for the first time.

Step forward the Joneses, a farming family based in Pontrhydfendigaid, Ceredigion, Wales.

Nestled amongst stunning picture-postcard scenery, the Jones’ land even features its own waterfall. However, despite beautiful appearances, their location also offers up problematic driving obstacles than cause



The children really enjoyed travelling in the Kodiao



The off-road route features mud and water crossings



Part of the extreme run the Jones family has to make to get the children to school

the family delays of anywhere between ten minutes and two hours.

Dad William often has to use his chainsaw to help remove fallen trees, whilst ice and floods also present regular challenges – with a broken-down lorry blocking the road for two solid days last year. The Jones’ cottage, Cwmmoiro, sits within its own micro-climate, meaning it can be snowing at home when it is raining at the children’s school.

Mum Sarah Jones explained: “Every day

when we wake up we don’t know what we’re going to come up against on our school run, which is part of the fun of living up here really. We could take our horse Willow, but a 4x4 makes things so much easier.”

Prior to its secretive arrival in Wales from the Czech Republic, the seven-seater Škoda Kodiao had completed over a million miles of testing in some of the most extreme climates around the world. In what was a typically wet and windy day in Pontrhydfendigaid,

that testing was the perfect preparation. The Joneses got to experience the Kodiao’s outstanding 4x4 functionality, cutting across the valley via a slippery off-road route that features lots of mud and water crossings.

Sarah Jones concluded: “We were hugely impressed with the Kodiao and our journey to school was the smoothest we’ve ever experienced. It tackled flooded areas and hills with ease and we enjoyed the headroom and nice little extras such as the heated seats. The

seven seats would definitely come in handy for collecting our children’s school mates and when they’re not being used, we can pop our dogs in the back. The kids really want us to buy one now!”

Watch the Jones’ extreme school run here: skoda.uk/ExtremeSchoolRun

Škoda’s first seven-seater SUV will start from just £21,495 and will be available in four trim levels with five engine options, two and four-wheel drive, and manual or DSG gearboxes.

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Connor Newell, aged 14 from Willenhall, practises in the water



Young club member Jaden Davies, aged seven



Chloe Hall, aged 12, gets to work in the pool



Swimming club members are now making a big splash

Swimming club hoping for new wave of interest

SPORTING FEATURE

By Lewis Cox

HEATH Town Swimming Club boast a long and illustrious history – and are now appealing for ‘fresh blood’ in a bid to keep the club afloat.

The ASA-affiliated outfit have been a registered club for 83 years, and several of their volunteers and have been involved for around half of that time.

They have seen good and bad times, riding the wave of great highs and plunging to the depths of difficult lows.

One of those lows arrived when their home – Bushbury Swimming Baths in Wolverhampton – was forced to close in November 2006.

Numbers dwindled but, thanks to a few hardy souls that kept the club going at other baths, the Heath Town club lived on.

“I think we were down to just 16 swimmers at that time,” said Sheila Ratcliffe, aged 69, a former welfare officer and now assistant coach at the club.

Important

“Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it’s very difficult to get it started back up again.”

It was the dedication of Ratcliffe and the committee that helped keep the club afloat.

They moved on to Wolverhampton Swimming and Fitness Centre shortly after and began building from the bottom again.

Ratcliffe, who has been helping out for 42 years, estimates there are around 200 members now connected with the club. But while that sounds impressive, she warns many of those are non-swimmers and some do not attend regularly.

They train on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings and use both the larger and smaller pool at the facility. “Numbers dwindle with kids in the sum-



Heath Town Swimming Club coach Rob Bonner at Wolverhampton Swimming & Fitness Centre

“Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it’s very difficult to get it started back up again.”

mer holidays but we expect that,” she said. “We need about 35 in the big pool and 20 in the little pool to pay the centre, it’s quite expensive.

“We cater for beginners and improvers and then they go into the big pool where we train with six lanes – our head coach Rob Bonner is a Level Two coach.”

Like Ratcliffe, Bonner’s association with the club began as merely ‘a parent’. Taking their children along to learn how to swim quickly turned into a hobby and a passion.

But Ratcliffe, originally from Wednesfield but who now lives in Willenhall, reflects the will to volunteer at a sports club is not what it once was. “We’ve adver-

tised for new volunteers or coaches – that we’d happily pay – to help keep our club going but people have too many other things to do these days,” she said.

“It’s not like it used to be. We also have Margaret Bennion, Alan Robinson and Joan Jarvis help out as volunteer coaches and they’ve been doing it nearly as long as me.

“The president, secretary and treasurer are all here but we’re all getting on and we need youngsters to step in, we need fresh blood.”

Club president is Ray Green, awarded the MBE four years ago for services to schools and swimming. His wife Sheila is secretary and Malcolm Foley – who used to swim with Ratcliffe’s daughter Wendy – is treasurer. “You can see how it is, we’ve all been here for a while and we love it and enjoy it but it is difficult,” Ratcliffe conceded.

“I never thought I’d be here all these decades later after bringing my children. If it wasn’t for my youngest grandson Connor coming to swim I might not have still been involved. But looking at it, it’s my passion and my hobby. We’ve been associated for so long, we just do it for the love.”

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Late free-kick earns a point for Glassboys

Stourbridge 1 Spennymoor 1
A 97th-minute free-kick from substitute Drew Canavan rescued an Evo-Stik Premier Division point for FA Cup heroes Stourbridge.

Glassboys keeper Matt Gould pulled off a string of good saves to ensure the first half ended goalless.

He denied David Dowson with an excellent stop and then dived bravely at the feet of Jamie Chandler after the diminutive midfielder had danced his way into the area.

The Glassboys rarely threatened before the interval but went close to breaking the deadlock five minutes into the second half when Dan Scarr's header from a corner was cleared off the line. But it was Spennymoor who opened the scoring on 59 minutes when Gould was finally beaten by Mark Anderson's looping header.

Luke Benbow, another shining light for the home side, twice went close to equalising as Stourbridge finished the stronger but it was left to Canavan to level deep into injury time.

Assistant boss Jon Ford described his side's performance was a little 'after the Lord Mayor's Show', but felt they deserved their point.

That result leaves Stourbridge ninth in the table, four points behind the last of the play-off positions, currently occupied by Hedgesford Town.

Ford said: "We'd been knocking at the door for a while and had a few opportunities, so I thought it was a just reward."

"Spennymoor are a very good side. You can see why they're up there and their recent form has been good."

"It was a bit after the Lord Mayor's Show but, following all the events of Tuesday night, we've managed to come away with a point against a very good side so we're pleased with that."

Crowd played big part in cup success, reveals hero Gater

STOURBRIDGE midfielder Connor Gater has revealed just how important the fans were in their FA Cup success against Northampton.

The Evo-Stik League Premier Division side pulled off a spectacular win against their League One opponents, taking them through to the third round of the FA Cup for the first time in the club's history thanks to Jack Duggan's dramatic winner.

Stourbridge now face League Two Wycombe on January 7. And Gater, who came on as a second-half substitute, praised the fans, as well as his personal friends and family, who roared the team to victory: "There's no greater feeling than playing for all your friends and family in the crowd," he said.

"They didn't disappoint, the fans were incredible, the adrenaline is great with the atmosphere like that."

He also revealed his pride at playing for his home town club: "It was a great feeling coming off the bench and playing for my home town club, with a great group of lads that made it happen, I'm proud of the way they played."

Greenwood back in Heathens colours

DAN GREENWOOD is on his way back to Cradley – three years after leaving the club.

Greenwood won the league and cup double with the Heathens in 2013 but was squeezed out of team plans the following season.

He's since spent three seasons with Coventry but has now agreed to be back with the nomadic Heathens, who will be racing most home meetings at Wolverhampton with some at Birmingham.

Greenwood said: "I had some great times there before and I like the management."

"Even though I've been riding with Coventry I've never lost touch with the Cradley lads. It's

Speedway

going to be good for me to link up with Tom Perry again, he's a great signing and the team is taking shape nicely."

Greenwood ended last season on the injured list at Coventry and needed surgery on his collarbone.

Heathens boss Will Pottinger said: "Dan has been a No.1 with Coventry but he comes to us third in the averages, so there's not any great pressure."

"I'm sure he can do a good job for the team, he was the rider who won the title in 2013 with a

race win and nobody will ever forget that," Pottinger added.

Heathens have also snapped up Wearside rider Ryan Burton.

The 23-year-old Sunderland-based rider joins Greenwood, skipper Tom Perry, Danny Ayres – who has joined from Kent – and Joe Lawlor in the 2017 team.

Heathens have, however, reluctantly released Bradley Andrews, the grandson of former Dudley Wood favourite Bob, from their plans.

Meanwhile Cradley's bitter rivals Birmingham have today confirmed the signing of Layne Cupitt, who had a brief spell with the club last season.

SIX OF THE BEST IN DK SEQUENCE

Whitchurch 10 DK 16

DK hit back from a 10-0 half-time deficit to extend their winning run to six games, the best current winning sequence in Midlands One West.

In the process, DK recorded their first double of the season.

In front of a good crowd, boosted by a good contingent of the Heathbrook faithful, Whitchurch started better, and were 5-0 up when a missed tackle on full-back Tom Davies led to the opening try.

DK had a chance to open their scoring when Tommy Walker was worked free on the left wing, but the final pass was around his ankles, and the chance was missed.

DK came under a period of pressure again and with so many defensive situations the referee decided John McGregor had infringed once too often and it was worthy of a yellow card. During the ensuing 10 minutes the DK defence cracked again and conceded another try. The two missed conversions were to prove important later.

Handling

DK threatened to open their scoring when Luke Greenwood broke through the middle of a maul with the ball and sprinted to halfway. He found Nic Adams who cut back inside and charged for the line this foray was stopped just short with the ball being killed by handling in a ruck, a penalty and yellow card.

For DK half-time was the turning point, whatever was said certainly worked in the next 40 minutes.

DK lost scrum half Joe Mullock to a serious-looking arm injury. But, from a penalty into the corner, the lineout, catch and drive led to Luke Greenwood crossing the line. George Ingram was unable to add the extras.

DK were soon back to parity, though, scored by Adams. This time Tommy Huggins took the kick, but put it wide. The same player did, however, add a penalty to put DK in front and the final score came from another Huggins kick.

The performance of Pete Griffiths at No8 probably kept DK in the game during the first half and was commented on by both sets of fans.



DK's Nic Adams almost gets away but is stopped in his tracks by this flying tackle

Depleted first team fall into drop zone

STOURBRIDGE Chess Club sent a strong team to face Greenlands in division 2 of the Worcestershire league and won 4-1 with wins for Dave Scriven, Sam Bradley and Richard Wilkin.

The league is now wide open. Stourbridge are mid-table on four points, four points adrift

of leaders Halesowen, but with three games in hand.

Stourbridge knew it was going to be difficult in division one of the Wolverhampton league and with several players unavailable, were forced to field three reserves away against Lichfield's strong first team.

Tony Shaw, Nic Fallowfield

and John Foxall all drew, but Stourbridge went down 4½-1½, putting them in the drop zone.

Stourbridge Chess Club is holding a Christmas blitz tournament on December 28 at 7.30pm in the Stourbridge Institute, open to club members, friends and prospective members.

Final judges take side of Mongan rival

DUDLEY boxer Jerry Mongan suffered disappointment in the National Association of Boys and Girls Clubs Championship finals.

Mongan, from Priory Park Boxing Club, featured at 48kg in Class A, the most junior of the sections for fighters born in 2001.

The former Schools national champion felt buoyant after an impressive semi-final victory over Luca Bloomfield, from Birtley gym in Gateshead. But in the other corner for the final, over three rounds, was slippery southpaw Dennis McCann, representing Repton in London but also from a travelling background.

The result hung in the balance come round three, but neither could establish a stronghold right up to the final bell. The judges went with McCann on a split decision.

Walsall Wood prospect Hamzah Ahmed suffered a double blow. He lost out on the national final for the second successive year.

Ahmed stepped through the ropes as slight underdog against a highly-rated opponent at the Action Indoor Arena in Bristol.

Ahmed had previously been thwarted in a Class A 57kg final and stepped up to Class B, for boxers born 2000, for this year at the same weight. Ahmed rocked rival Jamal Khan, from the Ring in London. A strong right uppercut set up a left hook which left Khan momentarily dazed and hanging on, the bell to end the first round coming to his aid.

They traded blows for most of the second, with Khan continuing to walk forward as Ahmed waited for openings.

Khan found his target with two right hands over the top in the third and last session, leaving a favourable impression on the judges. Three out of five went him on a split.

Yeltz continue to slide down table

Coalville 3 Halesowen Town 1
HALESOWEN Town's poor form continued and they have now not won in four games, sliding to 19th in the Evo-Stik Premier.

They Yeltz produced a bright start and their pressure paid off when Kaiman Anderson gave them the lead with his 17th goal of the season on 21 minutes.

But Massiah McDonald equalised on 26 minutes when he neatly slotted the ball home.

Ryan Robbins bundled Coalville ahead on 74 minutes and – three minutes later – it was game over when Alex Dean curled home.

★★★

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